A HISTORY OF AMERICAN TONALISM 1880–1920

CRUCIBLE OF AMERICAN MODERNISM

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DAVID A. CLEVELAND

FOREWORD BY JOHN WILMERDING

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For my father, ROBERT G. CLEVELAND (1910–2008), whose youth on West Eleventh Street was touched by the faltering flame of the Tonalists, and who was besting his daughters—an electrical engineer and PhD economist—at computer Scrabble just days before his passing at ninety-eight. A great ride, Dad: the landscapes in these pages mirror the life of the spirit we will forever share with you. And for my wife, PATRICIA HAAS CLEVELAND, and partner in the fascinating journey of rediscovering these forgotten masters of American art.

JACKET ILLUSTRATION
William Anderson Coffin, *Sunset in October* (detail), c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 14 × 20 in. Private collection. (See fig. 69, p. lxvi.)

ENDLEAF (FRONT AND BACK)
Richard Mayhew, *Misty Mystic* (detail). Oil on canvas, 30 × 40 in. Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York. (See p. 570.)

FRONTISPIECE
Ralph Blakelock, *Red Landscape* (detail), c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 12 × 18 in. Collection of Tina and Steven Price, New York.

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Foreword | JOHN WILMERDING

In opening this book, we first might be prompted to contemplate how the Tonalist movement, which bracketed the two decades on either side of 1900, represented the mood and state of America in that turn-of-the-century period; and second, why it is commanding attention again in our current millennial age. This cyclical recurrence of artistic taste and cultural sensibility almost exactly a century apart does not seem to be accidental. That we share a certain repetition of events and responses today with that earlier time has given us a heightened ability to appreciate and sympathize with the qualities of an artistic style intermittently marginalized, overlooked, or undervalued in the histories of American art.

The art that America produced up to the mid-nineteenth century was based on the natural wilderness that symbolized the New World, in which the divine hand of God was evident and the national story was one of heroic promise. With the nation's identity settled by 1825 when the Erie Canal opened, American prosperity and self-confidence surged under the exuberant optimism of Jacksonian democracy, Manifest Destiny, and the shaping of a hemispheric empire.

All that changed in the second half of the century, and like much in American life, the tenor and course of American art were radically transformed. Several factors contributed to strong shifts in taste: politically and socially, the dramatic and profound trauma of the Civil War; intellectually and spiritually, the threatening upheaval implicit in the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859; and economically, the acceleration of industry and technology. With the appalling death toll and destruction wrought by the war, both in literal and psychic terms, America's previous embrace of perpetual youth and regeneration now yielded to a dark sense of mortality and materiality. In turn, Darwin and his theories of evolution immediately challenged the notions of nature's progress and perfection, and, even more, its divine underpinning, with his revelations about natural accident and indifference in the shaping of the human condition. Meanwhile the telegraph, newspapers, lithography, the daguerreotype, and balloon-frame construction all brought new possibilities to communication and life across the continent. At the same time, advances of the railroad, which had symbolically united the country with the golden spike at Promontory Point in Utah in 1869, were soon associated with imagery of plumes of black smoke and scarring of the landscape.

Periodically, there were bank failures and market crashes—in the mid-1870s, the mid-1890s, and again in 1907. With the memory of Lincoln's untimely death still sharp, additional presidential assassinations occurred in 1880 and 1901. By 1893 the western frontier was declared closed, the Native American population increasingly retreated, and waves of immigrants accelerated their entry into the country in the later decades of the century. With the failure of Reconstruction, sectional divisiveness and racism were again on the rise. On all levels Americans had reason to feel anxious and unsettled. In this context a younger generation of artists maturing in the late 1870s and 1880s naturally felt the need for new stylistic expressions more appropriate to this very different temperament of the times. In particular, it is within this framework that we see the emergence and shaping of the Tonalist movement during the latter part of the nineteenth century. This would be a moody and reflective art, dissimilar from the earlier bravado of the Hudson River School and the spiritual epiphanies of Luminism.

At least two major artistic currents dominated later nineteenth-century painting. One was the powerful new realism of Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, Eastman Johnson, and John F. Peto. This was unlike the work of earlier generations, which favored the meticulous rendering of landscape details, the glowing nuances of meteorology, and the implicit presence of the divine in nature. This later realism was down-to-earth, its coloring often dark, brushwork solid and broad, its mood moving toward the introspective and psychological. Human mortality, not immortality, and the material world were its primary subjects. There was an alternative strain that was also brushy and contemplative, but more restrained and delicate, which David Cleveland argues here is exemplified in Tonalist painting. In fact, in his ambitious and singular argument, Tonalism is an almost all-embracing alternative, extending to include both the symbolic and otherworldly nocturnes of Albert Pinkham Ryder and the more dissolved landscapes of the American Impressionists. This will be one of the provocative discussions this book is bound to initiate in art history circles.

Both of these broad developments embody much of the nation's unsettled soul and sense of direction. The two great authors writing at the end of the nineteenth century, Henry James and Henry Adams, understood the profound disruptions at mid-century that implicitly led to their uneasy

OPPOSITE: Ben Foster. *Silent Creek*, c. 1910 (detail of fig. 5.127).

perceptions of America during their own time. James, in his 1879 biography of Hawthorne, noted, "[T]he Civil War marks an era in the history of the American mind. It introduced into the national consciousness a certain sense of proportion and relation, of the world being a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed, the future more treacherous, success more difficult." James was even more dismayed by the state of America several decades later when he returned in 1904 for a tour of his native country after a twenty-year absence as an expatriate. Two years later he published his ruminations in a book of travel writings, *The American Scene*, in which the major themes were loss of innocence and the ravages of change. For example, in the opening chapter on New England he observed, "[I]n the Boston neighborhoods, the work of time loomed large. What was taking place was a perpetual repudiation of the past." In a chapter devoted to New York he lamented, "The whole costly up-town demonstration was a record, in the last analysis of individual loneliness; whence came, precisely, its insistent testimony to waste." This sense of elegy and isolation is also found in many Tonalist landscapes.

For his part, Adams recalled being in Rome when "the assassination of President Lincoln fell on the party." Four decades later, he wrote in chapter 14 of his great retrospective autobiography, *The Education* (written in 1905, published in 1918), that "he saw before him a world so changed as to be beyond connection with the past.... his life was once more broken into separate pieces." To the later chapters in his book, covering the years 1870 to 1902, he gave such suggestively elegiac titles as "Chaos," "Failure," "Silence," "Indian Summer," "Twilight, and "The Abyss of Ignorance."

Much of this evokes the mood of Tonalism. Instead of the sublime noise of thunderstorms, crashing waterfalls, and heroic panoramas of Hudson River painting, or the self-confident order and clarity of Luminist compositions, the Tonalists now preferred scenes of silence, the subdued hours of twilight and colors of winter, the mysteries of nighttime and moonlight. Their brushwork noticeably loosened, concerned more with evocation than description. In contrast to the muscular realism of Homer and Eakins, which was largely devoted to the human figure or to what might be called the narrative landscape (featuring the figure in thought or action), the Tonalists overwhelmingly preferred pure landscapes usually devoid of the physical human presence. Theirs were spaces inviting meditation and escapism. If one looks at the patrons of this art, many were wealthy bankers and industrialists who we can well imagine sought solace, after long stressful days at the office, in the soothing softness, delicate colors, and private spaces of Tonalist pictures at home. Consider Charles Freer's passion for Thomas Dewing, whether his slender idealized women turning and relaxing in vaporous, otherworldly landscapes or posing quietly in near-empty rooms. In the Tonalist realm one could retreat from the anxieties and physical stresses of the outside world of 1900.

By that time, immigration, industrial machinery, and rapid urban growth had overrun the ideas of America as a wilderness paradise, and this inward-looking art became an understandable bulwark against the confusions and changes of the day right up to World War I. Emerging in response to the changed circumstances and temperament of America during the second half of the nineteenth century, Tonalism reached its peak of popularity in the century's final decades. Newly insecure, American artists increasingly had found the need to go abroad, whether for training, international acceptance, or different subject matter. Having remarked on the reverberations of Lincoln's death, Henry Adams wrote even more emphatically and eloquently about the dramatic new forces affecting intellectual life at the turn of the twentieth century.

Certain words with a modern ring recur in *The Education*: the subconscious, velocity, acceleration, relation, sequence of force, mysterious energy, multiplicity, chaos. In the period when Adams wrote, Freud was publishing his theories of dreams and psychoanalysis; the Wright brothers lifted off the ground in flight; Henry Ford developed and sold the automobile; and still photography gave way to motion pictures, pioneered by Thomas Edison, which were shown in the new nickelodeon. Movement underground occurred with the opening of the subway in New York, at the same time that the skyscraper reached new heights. Albert Einstein was also at work on his prophetic theories of relativity, and Adams recorded (in chapter 31) that "Mme. Curie threw on his desk the metaphysical bomb she called radium." All this and more was destabilizing modern life. Anxiety about the future became a natural and widespread condition. Thus it seems no accident that artists in these years turned to Tonalism's soothing visions.

In the years surrounding the beginning of the twenty-first century, bank failures, market tumbles, immigration pressures, space flight and black holes, the alternate universe of the Internet, and tensions between order and chaos have all been worrying issues for the American mind. While not identical to the fears that stalked the age of Tonalism a century ago, the broad coincidences have a striking resonance today, and may explain why we can now especially appreciate that movement with renewed interest and sympathy.

Although most of the major figures now associated under the rubric Tonalism have been well known and discussed in American art history for some time, the movement received its first major attention and popularity in 1972 with an exhibition curated by Wanda Corn at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco and her accompanying catalogue entitled *The Color of Mood: American Tonalism, 1880–1910*. In both the exhibition and publication, Corn included clusters of paintings by George Inness, Thomas Dewing, and James McNeill Whistler, along with photographs by Gertrude Käsebier, Edward Steichen, Alfred Stieglitz, and Clarence White, and selected examples by another two dozen significant and peripheral individuals. This publication set the benchmark for study of the field over the last quarter century.

During the last decade, however, attention to the Tonalists as singular painters and as a collective grouping has accelerated markedly. Inness, for example, has been the focus of a new catalogue raisonné by Michael Quick (2007), as well as revisionist monographs by Adrienne Baxter Bell (2003) and Rachael DeLue (2004). Lisa Peters at Spanierman Gallery in New York has recently undertaken revealing exhibitions of both central figures like John Twachtman and lesser-known ones like Charles Warren Eaton, the latter a particular enthusiasm of this book's author. In 2008, Ralph Albert Blakelock was the subject of a comprehensive traveling exhibition (*The Unknown Blakelock*) organized by the Sheldon Museum of Art at the University of Nebraska and shown at the National Academy Museum in New York and elsewhere; and at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, Marc Simpson curated a substantial exhibition and publication on the core Tonalists, *Like Breath on Glass: Whistler, Inness, and the Art of Painting Softly*. The title phrase was Whistler's (and reappears in David Cleveland's text): "Paint should not be applied thick. It should be like breath on the surface of a pane of glass." The enterprise revisited in greater scope and depth Corn's earlier project, with many of the same principals and followers, and an additional coda on the movement's legacy to Color Field painting of the 1960s. It concluded by reprinting as an appendix the text for *The Color of Mood* and an accompanying reflective reappraisal by Corn. Clearly the style and its practitioners have reached a moment of peak interest.

Cleveland's history is more sweeping than anything written by these predecessors. He presents the full chronology over several generations of artists, from the legacy and transformation of the Hudson River School and Luminists to the new light, color, and touch of artists now learning in Germany and especially France. He explores the writing and thought of Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Charles Darwin in particular as a crucial influence on American aesthetics of the later nineteenth century. The signature artists—George Inness, James McNeill Whistler, John Twachtman, Alexander Wyant, Dwight Tryon, among others—are treated within extensive individual sections. But we also come across multiple related names, including William Morris Hunt, John La Farge, and Dennis Miller Bunker; and just as many personalities that may be less well known to the American public, such as Leonard Ochtman, Henry Muhrman, Frederick Kost, Ben Foster, and Arthur Hoeber.

This is a panoramic and richly documented survey that provides summary biographies, pertinent period art criticism and exhibition histories, and close stylistic readings of individual works. Breaking with Wanda Corn's approach, Cleveland deemphasizes Tonalist and Pictorialist photography and instead ranges over expressions in a broad spectrum of other media, from painting to watercolor, pastel, and etching. Bringing to bear his talents as a published novelist and working art historian, Cleveland seamlessly fuses description with documentation, and clarity with complexity. He fashions a narrative that is passionate when desired, dispassionate when needed. In the process, he unveils the appeal of Tonalism both a century ago and again today.

JOHN WILMERDING is Professor of American Art, emeritus, Princeton University. He has written numerous books and articles on American art.

Acknowledgments

A History of American Tonalism is the culmination of more than twenty-five years of work in the field. At the root, the *History* is a search for answers to a perplexing mystery: How could America have lost sight of more than sixty of its greatest artists, many of whom seemingly disappeared without a trace? The question—the injustice of such a sad fate—still rankles. It is my hope and expectation that this peculiar case of cultural amnesia has now been addressed, misperceptions have been corrected, and the extraordinary genius of American Tonalism has been revealed in all its splendor. Crucially, more than sixty artists, who deserve our renewed attention and admiration, can now be reevaluated and enjoyed on their own terms. Their achievements place the origins of American modernism where it belongs: in the 1870s and not in 1907 or 1913. They are the true radicals of American art. I come away from this effort, not visually and intellectually exhausted, but exhilarated by all that I have found, with a renewed respect for these artists' path-breaking work, perseverance, and success in creating a dynamic—and very American—art against all odds. Never has the creation of new ways of seeing and feeling been so fraught with hardship. In turn, my admiration for the intellectual and spiritual life of our great-grandfathers has grown enormously: gone are the shibboleths about the conformity and conventionality of late-Victorian America.

The Tonalist landscape, as quiet as it is full of hidden emotion, offers us a glimpse, not just into ourselves, but into the hearts and minds of a forgotten generation, and so belies the tarnished image of a buttoned-down era, peopled in our imaginations, if at all, from dimly lit portraits and faded photographs. Their inner lives—mirrored in thousands of evocative artworks—dazzle. What, by today's standards, they lacked in terms of diversity is made up for by a liberality of spirit that, with better acquaintance, still has much to offer. There is fine bedrock here that we ignore at our peril. This post-Civil War generation—those born in the decades of the 1840s, '50s, and '60s and seared by the body counts of 1861–1865—was probably the last and most cohesive generation of American artists, writers, and intellectuals to share a common allegiance. They embodied a distinctive brand of progressivism, a liberal Protestant, post-doctrinaire reformist esprit-de-corps that combined tradition with innovation, a rapturous spiritual life with profound Darwinian wonder, and an imaginative brokering of individual, and often radical, aspirations with enduring cultural values. This was no small achievement. In some respects, their sophisticated discourse on a wide range of weighty matters—the thing that shaped the somber beauty of the Tonalist landscape—puts us to shame. Here in the poetic expansiveness of Inness, Whistler, Tryon, Charles Warren Eaton, and sixty more artistic lights can be found the glittering moonstruck sensitivities of a bygone age. In them we discover our own nostalgic needs, of truths edged with unnerving enigmas, of beauty only as real as it is ambiguous, of hopes both tragic and joyous. Above all, theirs was a practical and profound genius for resolving life's difficult contradictions in an age of uncertainty and turmoil: a heartfelt integrity that offers a guide for our own post-ideological age.

The greatest artworks are not simply documents of an age but mirrors to the deepest passions of the men and women who made that age live; in the Tonalist landscape we see ourselves reflected and thus obliterate the century that separates us.

No part of this journey would have been possible without the constant support of my wife Patricia; she has unflaggingly provided keen insights at every vantage point along this long road. My sons Carter and Christopher, whose enthusiasm for Tonalism has only grown with the years, have allowed me to see the work again and again with the enthusiasm of youth. And to my mother, Mary Manning Cleveland, 89 (whose youth touched the fading glow of the Tonalists), who dragged me around the Louvre at 12, my love and thanks; it all began with you. To my in-laws, George and Mary Jane Haas, whose love for American art and Charles Warren Eaton served as early inspiration to the world of the Tonalists. John Wilmerding, whose insightful Foreword graces this volume, has been a friend, mentor, and advisor for more than two decades. His scholarship remains an inspiration and touchstone for all who love American art. As an engaging teacher and raconteur extraordinaire, a role esteemed by my sons who studied with John at Princeton, he is without peer. My publisher, Leslie Pell van Breen, executive director of Hudson Hills Press, has been an enthusiastic supporter of this project from day one; her unvarying enthusiasm and professionalism as one of the last and finest art book publishers continues to set the standard for the industry. Designer Christopher Kuntze has been unflagging in his flair and sensitivity to the look and feel of the *History*, bringing text and images together in a package at once beautiful and engaging. Elin Cary at Hudson Hills Press has worked tirelessly and with great humor in the Herculean task of assembling all the images, while Hudson Hills Press editor Marisa Crumb has proved invaluable in her help with the text. Editor Stephanie Salomon has again been magnificent in improving the text and catching inevitable errors before they become errors. She has withstood the waves of expanding text with stalwart vigilance and helped transform a complex subject into a more welcoming journey for the reader. Proofreader Deborah Thompson has done extraordinarily fine work, including studying the tides in Venice and their correlation with nautical imagery. My profoundest thanks to photographer Becket Logan for his attention to detail and consummate artistry. He is responsible for many of the finest photographs in the *History* and is the best of the best.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the many collectors, galleries, and museums—the curators and staff who have shared their treasures with the readers of this publication. Without them, without the loving connoisseurship they provide, the genius of the Tonalist movement would still remain under wraps.

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DAVID ADAMS CLEVELAND
MAY 2009

INTRODUCTION

A History of American Tonalism: The Tonalist Movement, Lost and Found

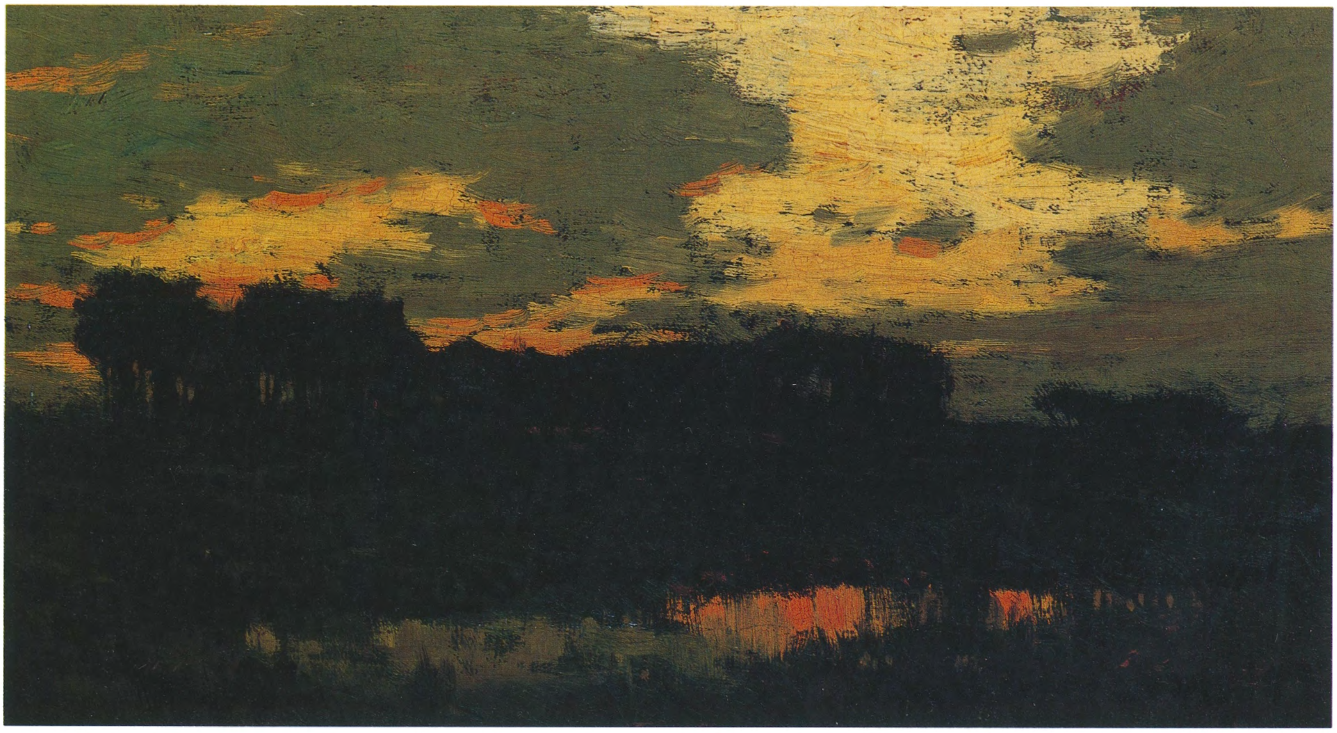
> *We had a remarkable sunset one day last November. I was walking in a meadow, the source of a small brook, when the sun at last, just before setting, after a cold, gray day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest, brightest morning sunlight fell on the dry grass and on the stems on the trees in the opposite horizon and on the leaves of the shrub oaks on the hillside, while our shadows stretched long over the meadow eastward, as if we were only motes in its beams. It was such a light as we could not have imagined a moment before, and the air was also so warm and serene that nothing was wanting to make a paradise of that meadow. When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever, an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still.*
>
> —Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*, 1812[1]

The Tonalist Movement, Lost and Found

In the four decades from 1880 to 1920 the Tonalist movement of intimate landscape painting flourished in America. Soulful, deeply expressive landscapes by artists such as George Inness, Alexander Wyant, J. Francis Murphy, Dwight Tryon, and Charles Warren Eaton—with Whistler's low-toned decorative Nocturnes an ever-tantalizing presence—limn the nostalgic uncertainties of fin-de-siècle America. With a deceptively modest yet modernist flair, the finest Tonalist painters touch on a prelapsarian innocence, tinctured with the insularity, idealism, and yearning for the bygone values of an agrarian world disappearing in the face of rapid industrialization and urban growth. The moody, often melancholy evocations summoned by Tonalist landscapes, in which autumnal, sunset, and nocturnal themes predominate, followed from the horrors of the Civil War, while the failures of Reconstruction, the anxieties of a boom-and-bust economy, and Darwinian doubts only added to the undertone of vague displacement that haunts these precincts of embodied memory. The Tonalist style—poetic, suggestive, spiritual, and deeply personal—was so ubiquitous in its day, and maintained its hold on the collective imagination with such beguiling power, that it may well be regarded as the defining aesthetic for turn-of-the-century America. Tonalism, a term coined around 1900 in contradistinction to Impressionism, was so pervasive that a modernist critic like Sadakichi Hartmann could write in 1910, "Tone is the ideal of the modern painter. It is his highest ambition. It is the powerful subduer of all the incongruities of modern art."[2] In a period variously described as the "Gilded Age," the "Brown Decades," or the "American Renaissance," when the Aesthetic movement and the Arts and Crafts movement infused the decorative arts, Tonalist landscapes dominated the exhibitions and filled the homes of upper middle-class collectors. Tonalist subjects, the near-to-home rural pastures and woodlots beloved by artists and their patrons, were enshrined on parlor walls across America, an art as democratic as it was enchanting. As the contemporary critic Ralcy Husted Bell wrote in 1916, "Better than the votaries of any other school known to me, the Tonalist catches the laughter of shimmering light, and transmutes it into pictorial joy; he speaks admirably the old mother-tongue of cloud, tree, pool, and stone; he interprets the spring; he is summer's scribe, page to the majesty of autumn, and priest to the whole round year. With a simple palette, and as if by magic, he expresses breadth, teasing transparency, mysterious distances, the illusion of luminosity—in a word, the drama of air, light, and colour. Taken all in all, his pictures challenge, please, and convince. As a last refinement, he permeates them with his own individuality, and thus may he be called a creator."[3]

In the late 1870s and early 1880s, hundreds of European-trained American artists arrived home fresh from art study in Paris, Munich, London, and the American art colonies in Brittany. In league with their indigenous counterparts—the self-taught or New York–trained artists—they quickly broke the monopoly of the established Hudson River School, known for its precisely detailed wilderness panoramas and evocations of patriotic glory and God's bounty. The raw skepticism produced by the Civil War's death toll blunted the enthusiasm for such effusions of national pride. The "new men," as they were known in newspapers and art periodicals, took pride in their hard-won skills; they were determined to revolutionize what they considered a moribund American art scene. The Tonalists came to prominence in the decade of the 1880s, reaching a critical mass of popularity by 1900, and remained

OPPOSITE: Charles Warren Eaton. *Sunset Pines*, c. 1900–10 (detail of fig. 7.35).



Charles Warren Eaton, *Maine Pines*, c. 1900 (detail of fig. 5.107).

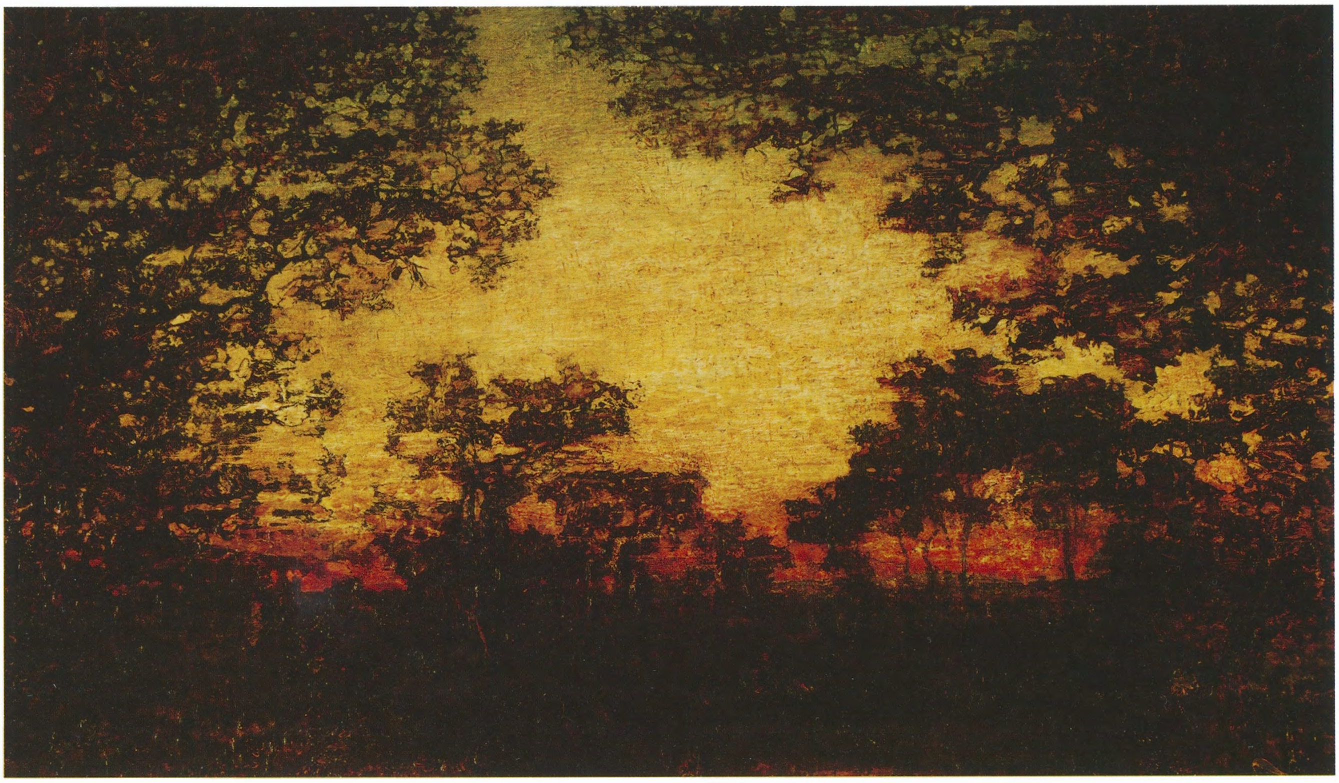
one of the most vital and influential movements in American art right up to World War I and the decade beyond. Tonalism's resilience and longevity was the result of not only its delicate somber beauty and evocation of values dear to the post–Civil War generation—the first to experience the full onslaught of modern war and industrial civilization—but also its radical and innovative nature and inherent capacity to encompass both traditional and modernist impulses. Tonalism's modernity, its transcendentalist and Whistlerian embodiments, was seen by critics as epitomizing America's progress in the arts, and expressing the individual and native brilliance of its finest exponents. It was a landscape art embraced by a tolerant and liberal Protestantism along with Emerson and Thoreau—and even Darwin. In the eyes of its patrons and creators, Tonalism was the first truly American art, combining European sophistication with a genuine American spirituality: the "real right thing." Tonalism, very much a manifestation of a young melting-pot culture, drew upon a range of abstract formal values, both historical and contemporary, including the rediscovery of Velásquez's envelope of atmosphere, especially the Spanish artist's variegated low tones and pictorial synthesis; the broadly brushed soft-edged forms of the English painter John Constable and the abstraction of Turner; the realism of the French Barbizon school; and Whistler's non-anecdotal, suggestive, and refined arrangements of subtle color and form—the essence of his harmonies. To this mix, American talents like George Inness, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Ralph Albert Blakelock added an element of mystic romanticism—often described by modernist historians as "visionary."

In retrospect, with the perspective of more than a century's distance, the American Tonalists, after nearly seven decades of neglect, can reclaim their rightful place as the avant-garde of the 1880s and the modernist pioneers of 1900. In the best of Inness, Whistler, Ryder, Tryon, Murphy, Twachtman, and many others, the formal values of the modernist canon were first employed with conviction: abstract patterning, exquisite surface textures, gestural and expressive pigment use, and symbolic form embodying a vital spiritualizing energy. As an insurgent school or movement, the Tonalists broke with prevailing establishment orthodoxy, pioneered new, non-narrative forms of expression, and touted subjective individualism as the spearhead of artistic innovation: all hallmarks of turn-of-the-century modernism.

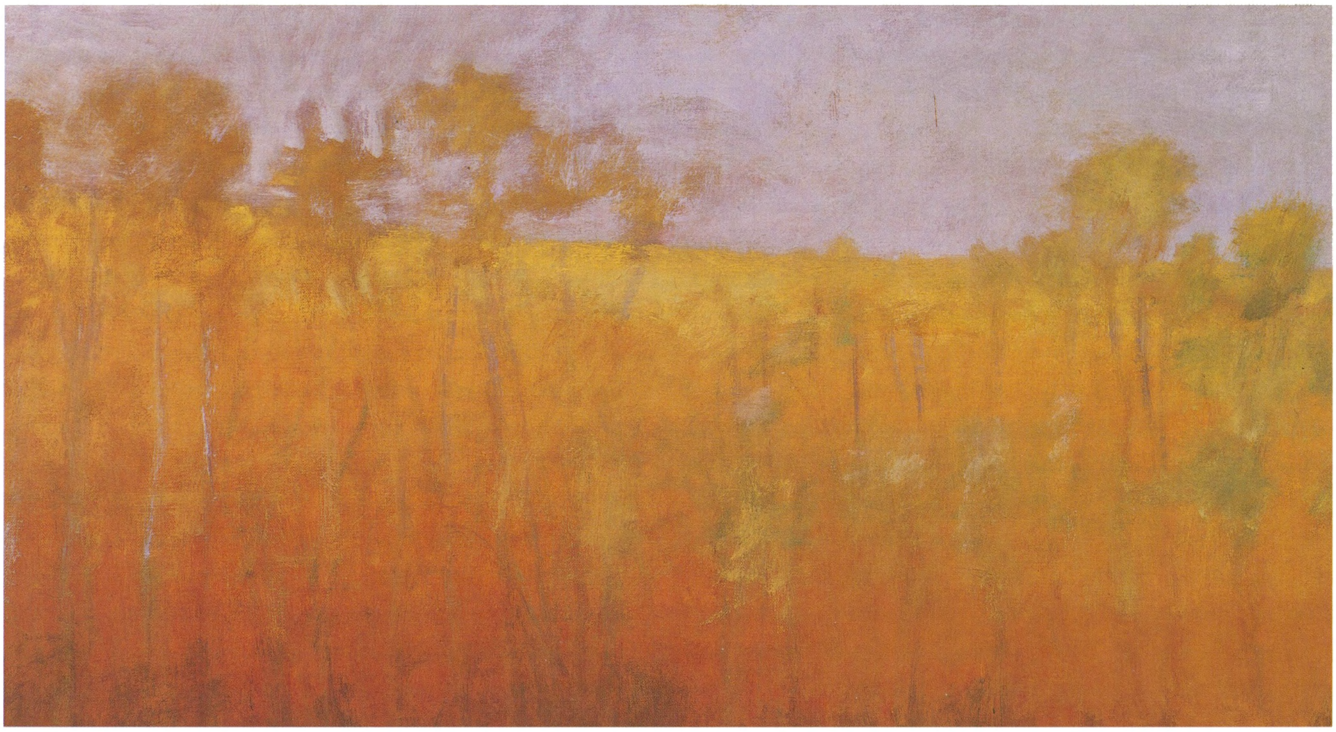
Turn-of-the-century modernism evolved in the 1880s from a quietest Whistlerian abstraction, what might be called "Aesthetic Tonalism," to a more expressive and simplified art of deep symbolic power by 1900, which can be viewed as "Expressive Tonalism." (I have adopted these two terms throughout this book as useful general categories to describe and differentiate the look of Tonalist works, respectively, from the 1880s and 1890s and those from around 1900 and after.) Increasingly shorn of overt literary or narrative context—and, for the most part, absent the human figure—Tonalism invoked the silence, solitude, and secret yearnings of the private imagination, and the sentiments touching on man's sometimes perplexing relationships with both nature and society. The killing fields of the Civil War, a brutal capitalist economy, mass immigration, and Darwin's unsettling notions changed everything. Tonalism's cool serenity is deceptive; it was an art for uncertain times. It is this uncertainty and ambiguity that places Tonalism at the fountainhead of American modernism. As will be seen, the radicals of the late 1870s like J. Frank Currier and John Twachtman, following in the footsteps of Whistler, La Farge, and Inness, changed the way Americans imagined their homeland, and themselves, until by 1900 a radical and distinctly American visionary art had taken hold. In turn, the artists in the Stieglitz circle—John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Georgia O'Keeffe—were weaned on the Tonalist aesthetic as it evolved after 1900. Tonalist artists like Albert Pinkham Ryder, J. Francis Murphy, and Dwight Tryon directly influenced Milton Avery; and from Avery followed Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman, and postmodern Tonalists like Wolf Kahn. The Tonalist aesthetic may well be the most fundamentally ingrained impulse of the American imagination.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about Tonalism has been its vanishing act. How could a movement that dominated American art for almost four decades become so lost to American art history and the art-going public for almost seventy years—from the 1930s to the turn of the twenty-first century? How could close to sixty of America's best artists fall into near total obscurity? From the Depression to the Millennium, Tonalism barely figures in art history texts and exhibition catalogues. When it does—often vaguely and in passing or buried in footnotes—it is mostly dismissed as a retardataire post-Barbizon style, a backward-looking effusion of the Gilded Age, or a leftover of the dowdy taste of our Victorian forebears. Although artists like Inness, Whistler, Ryder, Blakelock, Thomas Dewing, William Merritt Chase, and Tryon remained important to scholars and connoisseurs through the twentieth century, the majority of Tonalist artists, many with well-earned reputations in their day, were forgotten, their paintings relegated to the storerooms of museums, which had once avidly purchased the artists' prize-winning efforts. Many Tonalist paintings were deaccessioned from art institutions after 1950, turning up in auctions for a fraction of the price at which they had originally sold. The neglect of the period, the mischaracterization of Tonalism and its vital modernity, much less the stellar achievements of its best artists, were the result of market forces, changing tastes, and the vagaries of scholarship, which resulted in a misreading of Tonalism's crucial role in the history of American art. As will be argued, Tonalism encompasses all the complexities of its era and sounds the depths of the late-Victorian American psyche—depths of which contemporary critics and scholars, such as Ralcy Husted Bell, were only too well aware. Bell noted in 1916 that the Tonalists' "dramatic landscapes arouse an emotional intensity fed by the tragic associations of human experience; and there are others which thrill, as it were, with the epic faith of man in his own splendid destiny. In the aspect of some may be found heroism, toil, and suffering almost to savage joy; and in still others there is something which arouses the supreme rapture as it corresponds to life's aspirations just before their inevitable, periodic recoil—which in art is one phase of rhythm."[4]

The inroads of European modernism from the 1913 Armory Show onward did much to challenge the reputations of artists



Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Twilight Mood*, c. 1890s (detail of fig. 4.58).



Wolf Kahn, *Yellow Gold*, 1991 (detail of fig. 8.165).

of the core Tonalist generation born between 1840 and 1865. By 1913 the Tonalist establishment, the radicals of the late 1870s and 1880s, were old men. The enthusiasm for brighter palettes, academic impressionism, and jazzy fauvist facture, and the more cosmopolitan subject matter and vigorous brushwork employed by the likes of George Bellows, made the cohorts of Whistlerian aestheticism seem down on their heels and slightly passé. Tonalist canvases became increasingly lumped in with the "dark pictures" of the art trade and so increasingly difficult to sell as the twenties turned into the 1930s. The Great Depression was the coup de grâce to both the American art market in general and the reputations of the old guard Tonalist painters in particular. Growing Marxist sympathies on the one hand and isolationism on the other during the 1930s saw tastes gravitate to competing styles of Social Realism and renditions of the American scene (Regionalism), making the refined and ethereal canvases of the Tonalist masters seem even more out of touch and irrelevant to the struggles of the moment. By the rise of postwar Abstract Expressionism, Tonalism was largely forgotten even as its heritage was deeply embedded in the formal concerns of Milton Avery, who passed his updated Tonalist style on to his friends Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and William Baziotes, and later Wolf Kahn. In turn, Color Field painters like Helen Frankenthaler and Jules Olitski took the minimalist abstract essence of Tonalism and imbued it with sensual gestural expression, while often hinting at references to the natural world. Today, the contemporary art scene is filled with Tonalist painters, many—including Kahn—who pay direct homage to the progenitors of the tradition. Through it all, the American landscape remained an unavoidable and indispensable birthright, luring generation after generation of American artists to make it the focus of their creative explorations.

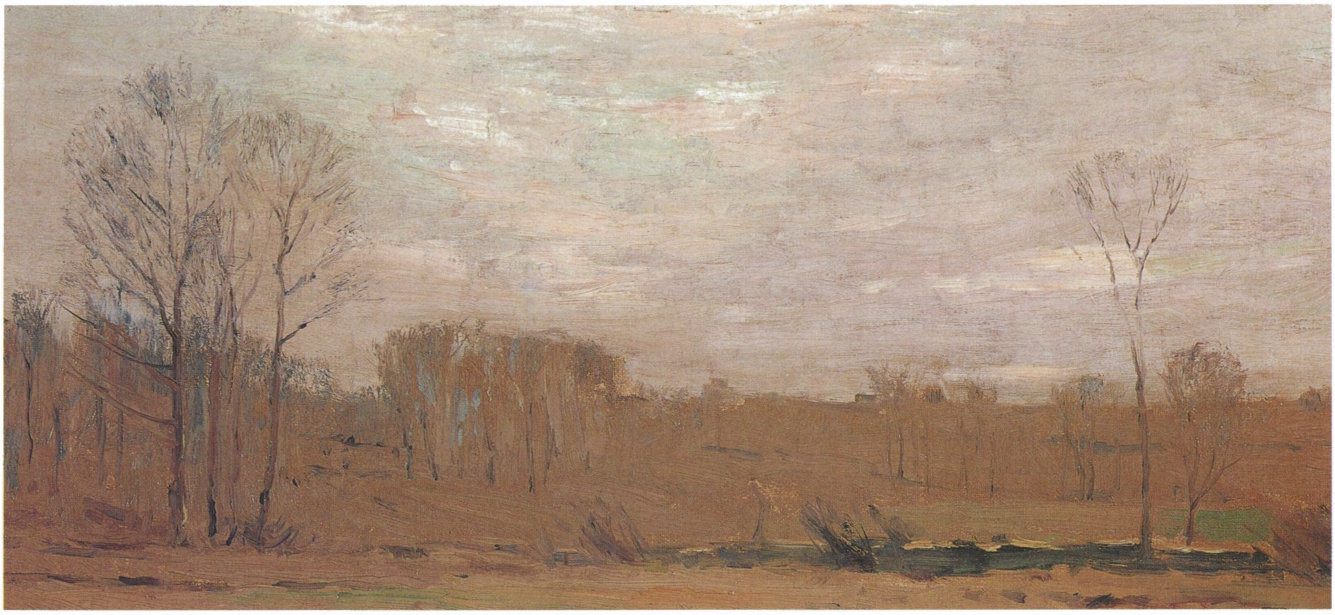
Scholarship and the gallery and museum world were slow to regain sight of this lost generation of American Tonalists, or to recognize their remarkable significance and contributions to the history of American art. Partly this had to do with taste and timing; the marketplace also played a role. The first postwar generation of scholars—who cut their academic teeth in the 1950s and wrote their seminal works in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, prominent among them Theodore Stebbins and John Wilmerding—concentrated on the heroic generation of the Hudson River School, an artistic generation equally lost to memory and scholarship in the 1960s and 1970s as the Tonalists were in the 1980s and 1990s. It took decades of scholarship for Hudson River artists like Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Frederick Church, Sanford Gifford, Albert Bierstadt, Martin Johnson Heade, Fitz Hugh Lane, and John Kensett, along with a host of others, to find their way out of the attic of foundered reputations. Finally, by the century's end, numerous museum and gallery exhibitions restored these pioneering artists to their position as the founding generation of the American landscape tradition. The tremendous rise in prices for Hudson River School paintings is another indication of the success of this reappraisal. American art historians in the 1970s and later, led by John Wilmerding, developed the concept of "Luminism" to describe the preoccupation of many Hudson River School artists with a certain quality of spacious and spiritualized light: cool, planar, and radiant. During the postwar years the tradition of American realism, too, especially as exemplified in the careers of Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and John Singer Sargent, received a thorough reappraisal in scholarly and museum circles, as did American Impressionists like Childe Hassam and Theodore Robinson.

Not until the 1980s and 1990s was the groundwork laid in exhibitions and catalogues for a revival of attention to the Tonalists. Monographs and shows on George Inness, Whistler, Thomas Dewing, Henry Ward Ranger, Charles Warren Eaton, and others have produced a critical mass of scholarship, allowing a full reappraisal of the Tonalist heritage. Just as the Hudson River School went into a precipitous decline in the late 1870s and had to wait nearly one hundred years to regain its luster, so the Tonalists endured a similar decline in the years after 1920 and have needed the perspective of a century to reassess their importance in the history of American art. This was especially true of the early Tonalist work, which was scattered and has only come to light in piecemeal fashion, unlike the later work, which tended to be bought by moneyed collectors and then moved seamlessly to museum collections.

Even with this reappraisal, the suave refinement of Tonalism has largely been overshadowed by the contemporaneous work of American Impressionism (spurred by adulation for its French counterpart), both in the marketplace and in terms of scholarship devoted to the movement. This has distorted both the historical and artistic reality. In the decades surrounding 1900, Tonalism was the dominant style in American art and fundamentally absorbed and eclipsed the inroads of French Impressionism in the work of its American exponents, which reached a height as an innovative force approximately between 1890 and 1895. By 1900, Impressionism in America and Europe was dated, replaced by Post-Impressionist movements, including Whistler's dematerialized Expressive Tonalism, an art suggestive, mysterious, evasive—often pared to iconic essentials, which influenced late Monet, Degas, and the Symbolists. As will be explored in chapter 8, it is Tonalism, an essentially indigenous style, not European-derived Impressionism, that entered most fully into the gene pool of American modernism.

The ultimate success and staying power of American Tonalism had much to do with its peculiar American heritage, especially its quasi-religious power and rootedness in the Transcendentalist tradition of spiritual reverie. As chapter 7 will spell out in some detail, the American Tonalists were avid readers of the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, and not only in their original writings, but in the writings of their heirs, John Burroughs and John Muir, along with multitudes of writers and poets found in the pages of mass-circulation publications like *Scribner's Magazine* and *The Century Magazine*, as well as fellow artist William Morris Hunt, whose influential *Art Talks* of 1878 is couched in Emersonian exhortations and metaphors. Darwin, too, played a largely creative and even dynamic role in opening the New England mind to the hidden splendors and underlying forces at play in nature: the enchanting power of metamorphosis to produce change without change, the multiplicity found within an essential unity, and the kind of unseen motion a sensitive observer like Thoreau detected everywhere in the landscape. Tonalism, in its technical repertoire, the elucidation of vibration and refraction of like tones, actually provided a visual metaphor of metamorphosis, of the feeling of change that, in moments of reverie, seems changeless. Unlike American Impressionism, with it focus on the quasi-scientific recording of fleeting light, Tonalism was shaped in the crucible of an indigenous sensibility that sought the enduring in the momentary: a very American reverence for the concrete and visible while striving to elucidate an underlying spiritual presence. Paradoxically, while attempting to capture the enduring—the underlying spirit of place, much as Proust had sought for the permanent in the palimpsest of memory, Tonalism brokered a compromise between the materialist and spiritualist camps of American philosophical and theological discourse. In a bookish postbellum age, a skeptical age, in some ways even more secular than our own, Tonalist landscapes provided a haven for the weary mind: a tonic and quasi-mystic aura of near religious intensity, what contemporary critic Sadakichi Hartmann called a "science for the soul . . . that may mystify us and lift us above the prose of every-day existence."[5] This hybrid strain of spiritual-romantic sensibility grafted onto a practical respect for the everyday reality was very much in keeping with the culture of the age. The resultant Tonalist version of Emersonian uplift, not unlike America itself, combined seemingly disparate elements of European polish with native predispositions (including the critical influence of Japanese art) to form an inimitable and paradoxical style: expressive of deep sentiment but not sentimental, representational but essentially abstract, at once real and ideal. Paraphrasing George Inness, it was an art that above all things awakens an emotion. In its expressive character, Tonalism was a mirror to the hard-edged anxieties and joys of its age.

In exploring the history of Tonalism, a central issue that has preoccupied American artists, critics, and scholars for more than two centuries is again raised. What is America's distinct contribution to the history of art? Is there such a thing as a truly American style or sensibility? In the age of globalism, cultural diversity, and the Internet, such preoccupations may seem almost beside the point. But the question tantalizes as does the habit of mind of our great-grandfathers. For our forefathers who came of age during the Civil War and its aftermath, raised on the writings of Thoreau and Emerson, Whitman and Poe, including the core generation of Tonalists born between



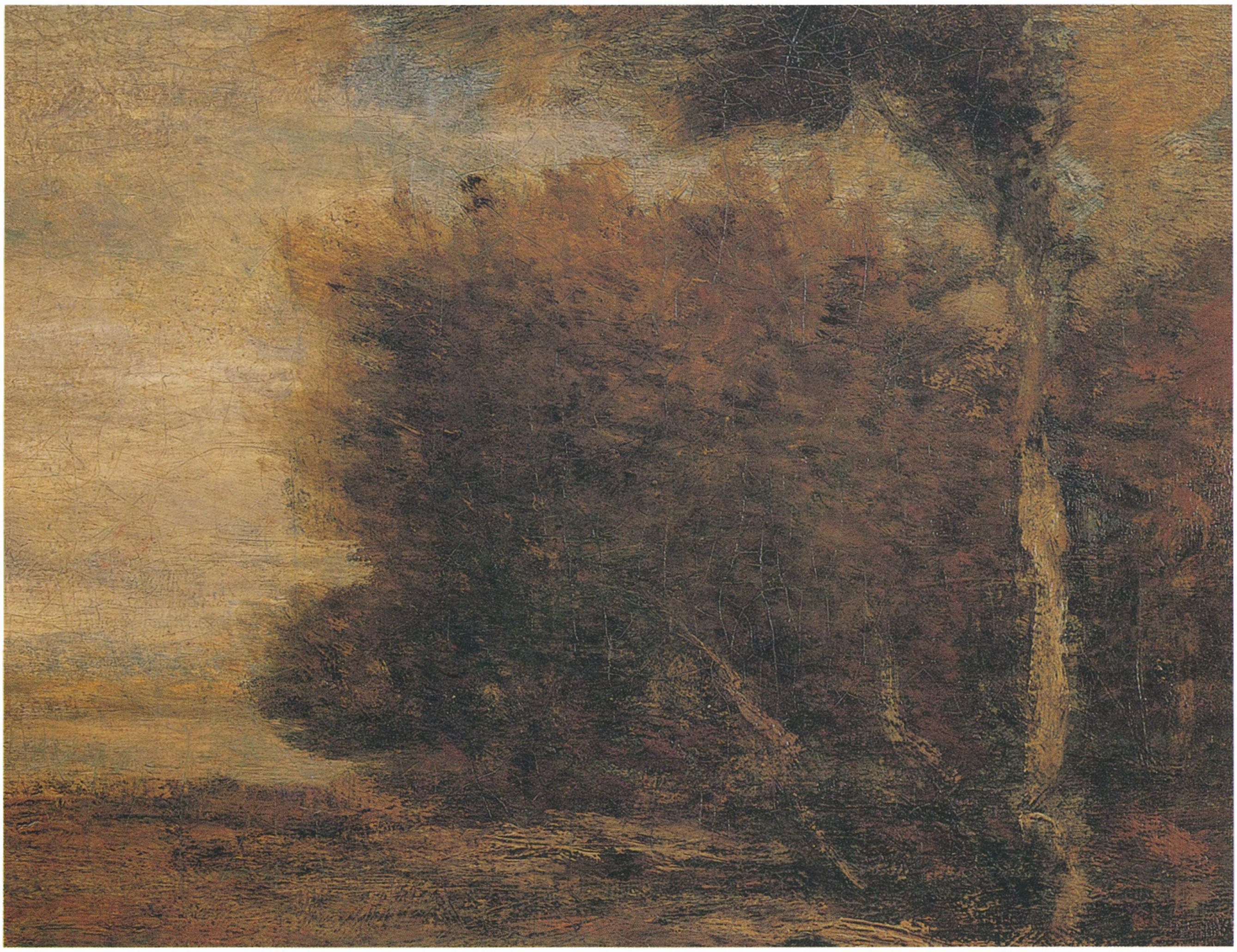
Charles Warren Eaton, *Late Winter Pasture*, 1900 (detail of fig. 5.106).

1840 and 1865, the question of forging a distinct American identity was a burning generational issue—as crucial as the development of a distinct voice for the individual artist. The branding of a unique American art was central to the Tonalists' sense of their ultimate worth. As will be seen in chapters 1 through 4, European training was seen as a mixed blessing—crucial for professional competence, but potentially damaging to the integrity of an inherent American vision. The naïve, often-awkward technique of a George Fuller or Albert Pinkham Ryder might be excused in sophisticated art circles precisely because these artists embodied some ethereal and wholesomely sanguine American truth, while the cosmopolitan Munich School bravura of William Merritt Chase might be condemned for being all glittering surface and lacking the profound sentiment necessary in a quintessentially American art. The struggle to define what constituted an American art and how to integrate European means with American ends preoccupied artists and critics in the last decades of the nineteenth century, not unlike the struggles for personal and American distinction pursued by the Abstract Expressionists at mid-century in the face of Picasso and Matisse. The issue was endlessly dissected: was it simply a matter of style, subject matter, or underlying sensibility—or some illusive combination?

The Tonalist landscape evolved and flowered in the crucible of this controversy, as the old Hudson River men were shunted aside and, in turn, the slick purveyors of European figurative genre were dealt with harshly by critics like the *Times'* Charles de Kay, who despised the aping of European fashion. De Kay, a poet and novelist, deeply imbued with the Transcendentalist aspirations of the New England mind, acted as a critical guide through much of this history of American Tonalism. His critical eye, his early championing of the likes of Albert Ryder and George Inness, has held up well over a century. As a member of the Gilder circle (his brother-in-law was William Gilder, publisher of *Scribner's Magazine* and the *The Century Magazine*), de Kay was at the epicenter of America's artistic coming of age. An insider's insider, de Kay extolled the Tonalist landscape, as opposed to figurative or genre painting, because of its inherent carrying power as a visual expression of a distinctly American spirituality, a power growing directly out of associations with and habits connected to home ground, and thus deeply felt and personal. In de Kay's opinion, such expressions of idiosyncratic temperament were key to a vibrant national art. It was also de Kay's profound belief that sophisticated foreign training, when harnessed to homespun predilections, could produce an American art expressive of a native value system—or as the cultural historian Van Wyck Brooks described, "the ethos of the race." Such was the holy grail of turn-of-the-century American critics and writers, and certainly something the French were eager to discover in American art by 1900—and the Americans equally determined to expound and defend. As will become clear in this history, Tonalism, in the hands of its best exponents, depicted both the quotidian love of the land and the deepest spiritual intuitions of the American character. In this, Tonalism—given the breadth and longevity of the movement—may indeed represent a fundamental American mode of expression, akin to Shaker style and other aspects of folk art in its underlying abstraction, symbolism, and creation of and allegiance to iconic forms. In 1900, European and American commentators and critics in the aftermath of the Paris Exposition Universelle certainly believed the Tonalist landscape in the hands of its greatest exponents—Whistler, George Inness, Alexander Wyant, Homer Dodge Martin, and others like Winslow Homer and Ben Foster—constituted a national school and expressed an original native sensibility.

Tonalist artists, their critics, and patrons passionately aspired to as much; they were intent on bettering their European colleagues and forging an American identity—proud and convinced that they had done so. In 1904, the Tonalist art establishment in New York, centered on the Society of American Artists, the Lotos Club, and their associated artists, collectors, and critics, held a comparative exhibition of European and American art, matching up Corot, Rousseau, Daubigny, Monet, Renoir, Boudin, Jongkind, and others with their American contemporaries like Inness, Martin, Wyant, Tryon, Kost, Murphy, Ranger, La Farge, and Charles H. Davis. The American art establishment and public were shocked to find that the Americans were not only as good, but in many cases better than the Europeans: more poetic, subtler in the use of tone and richness of vision. As Charles de Kay observed, "The fight has been too long one way; for Americans who have been overcome by the admirable things that meet them on a visit to Europe have been blind to what their own land produces, as fine as and in many cases finer than the products of European hands."[6]

Chapters 1 and 2 will examine the ways in which the godfathers of the Tonalist movement—Hunt, La Farge, Inness, and Martin—were actually fortified in their identity as American artists by their years studying and working in Europe, which, if anything, heightened their appreciation for homespun values. Chapter 3 will explore how important expatriates like J. Frank Currier, Alexander Harrison, and Charles Fromuth produced innovative American art on foreign shores, unlike so many expatriates who remained abroad, inveigled by European tradition, only to become clones of dead academic fashion. This discussion will also demonstrate that Whistler proved the great exception to the case of the American expatriate artist; he managed to use his American nationality, his status as an outsider, as a platform to develop his radical doctrine of suggestive minimalism and low-toned harmonies. Paradoxically, his influence in his native land was more widespread and profound in the 1880s and 1890s than it was in London or Paris; only by 1900 was his influence in Europe as ubiquitous as it was in America. The foreign-trained Americans, who flooded back to the United States in the early 1880s, discovered that Whistler was all the rage at the



Homer Dodge Martin, *Lake George*, c. 1884 (detail of fig. 2.22).

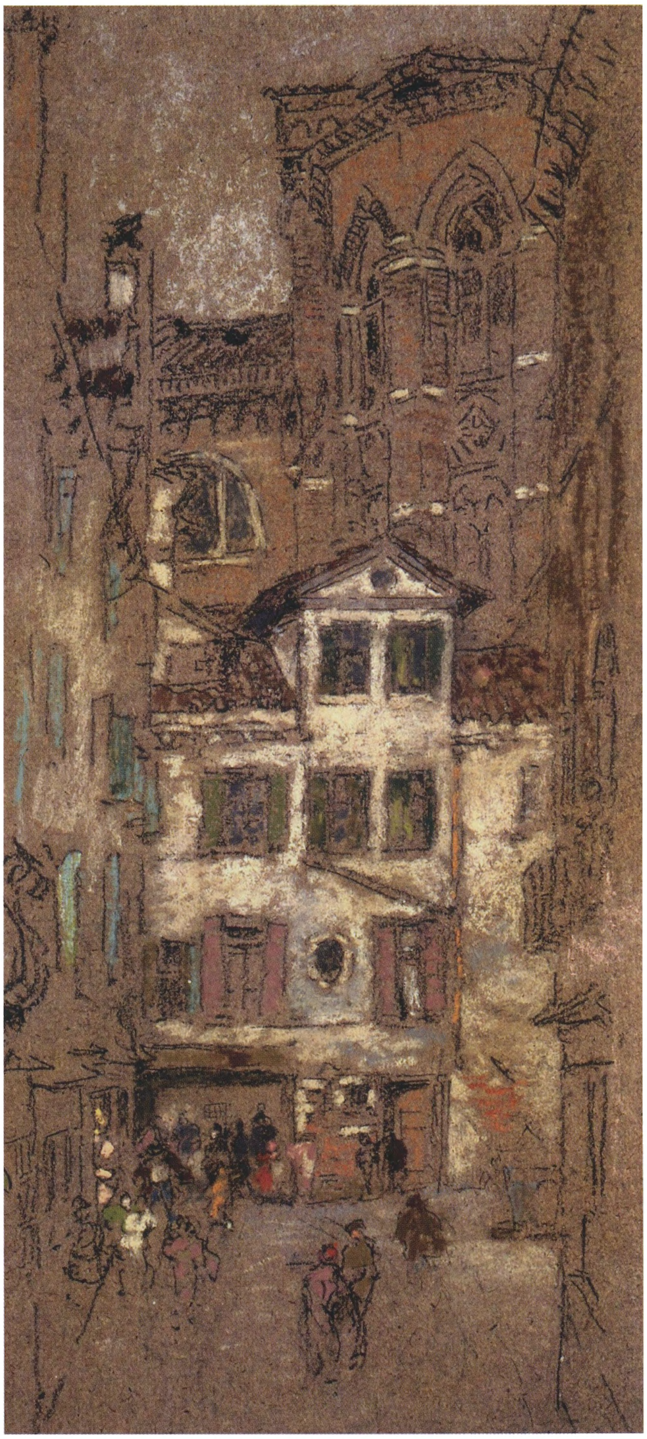
progressive Art Students League and the radical Society of American Artists. The Tonalist Dwight Tryon was stunned, upon his return from Paris in 1881, to find more advanced art being exhibited at the Society of American Artists in New York than what he had known in Paris.

Chapter 4 will survey the origin and development of the Society of American Artists, an organization of professional artists that formed the cockpit of progressive art in America for over two decades. In chapter 5 we will explore how the "new men" and their indigenous radical countrymen consolidated the development of a new national art by following on from the Art Students League and the Society of American Artists with an array of new professional associations to further their cause: a practical necessity in the face of the vogue for European art and the critical need to establish a market for American art. Chapter 6 will tell the story of the development of the Tonalist movement and many of its major figures in the 1880s and 1890s. The discussion in chapter 7 will delve into the cultural history and background of the Tonalist movement, bringing to the fore the dazzling depths and spiritual complexity of what, for more than three generations, has been dismissed as a relatively naïve and provincial style of landscape art. By chapter 8, which takes a wider view of Tonalism after 1900, exploring the ways in which it formed the underpinnings of American modernism, it is intended that the reader will have a better grasp of this profoundly moving art, and the landscape poetics so beloved of our forebears. Fifty Tonalist artists will have been put in context, and their visionary art revealed in all its subtle splendor: the rare lyrical poetry of a bygone age.

The cohesiveness of the Tonalist school is a marvel. Never before or since has such a large generation of artists been as close-knit and maintained such a coherent style over so many decades. The core Tonalist generation born in the decades 1840 to 1865 shared studios in New York, belonged to the same professional societies—the Society of American Artists, the National Academy, the New York Water Color Club, the American Watercolor Society—socialized together at the Lotos Club, the Salmagundi Club, the Century Club, and the Players Club, while sharing exhibition space in the most prominent galleries in New York and across the country. With the perspective of a century, we can now finally appreciate their singular achievement and crucial contribution to the living stream of American art (see List of Artists: The Three Generations, p. 571).

Tonalism, the Style: A Definition and Overview

While the term "Tonalist" goes back at least to the 1880s, if not before, "Tonalism" seems to have acquired its present connotation by 1890. The reviewer of the Society of American Artists exhibition of 1890, in the May 8, 1890 edition of *The Nation*, used the term in contradistinction to Impressionism: "... while in landscape the whole gamut is struck, from somber tonalism through frank naturalism ..." Between 1900 and 1910, the term "Tonalism" came into wider currency as denoting a distinct type of American art. "Tonalism" was used by critics and scholars like Ralcy Husted Bell and Sidney Allan (Sadakichi Hartmann) in reference to the Tonal School of painting and pictorialism in photography by 1914 and 1915.[7] The "Tonal School" as a descriptive category of a peculiar brand of low-toned American painting appears to have its origins in the



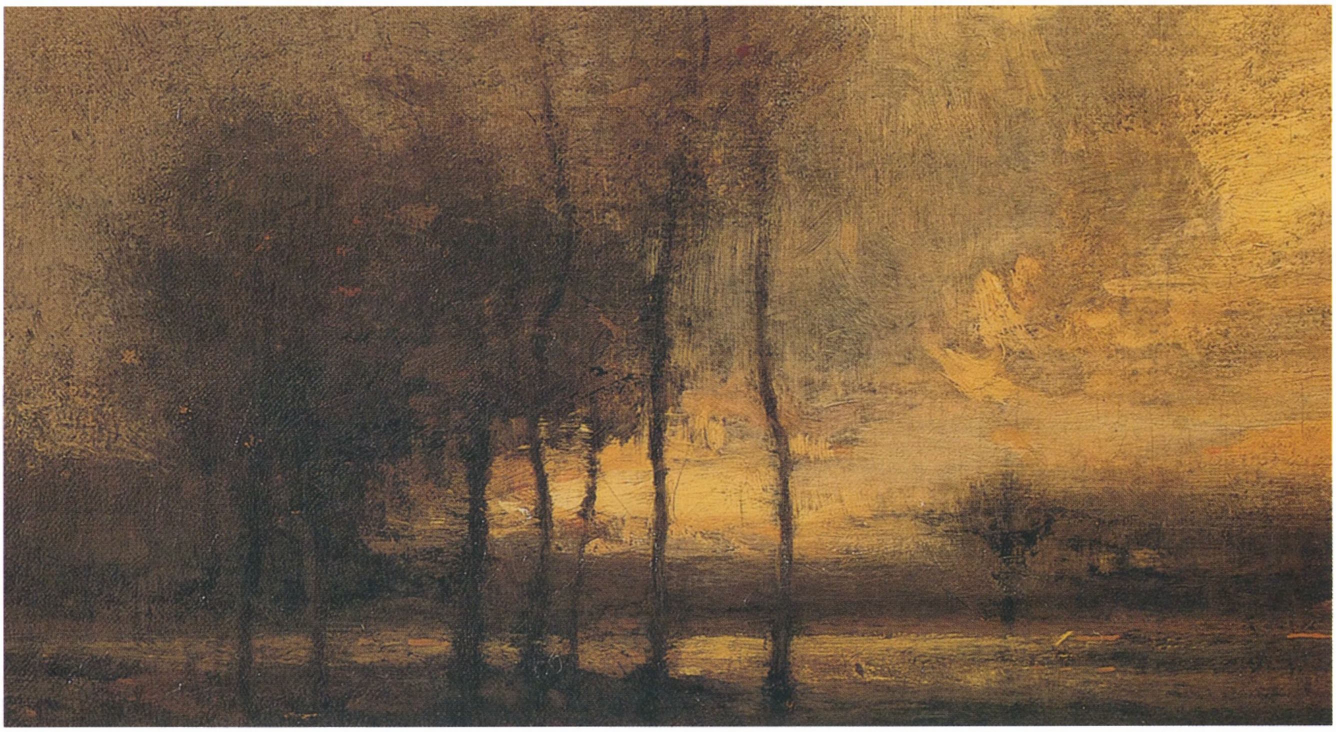
James McNeill Whistler, *Under the Frari*, c. 1879–80 (detail of fig. 3.69).

1890s and certainly was widely employed after 1900. Tonalism as a name remained in scattered use in critical and scholarly circles right through the mid-twentieth century, and then gained wider scholarly currency from the 1970s on. By the 1880s, "Tonalist" was often used to describe a movement or school, types of painting, and the artists who emphasized tonal values in their work and the concomitant expression of poetic feeling or mood so invoked. Such terms as "tone" or "in tone," or "tonal" or "tonalist" or "tonality" or "low-toned"—also "tonist"—were often and widely used interchangeably in a descriptive sense, or critical terminology, as in "... to keep the parts of his picture in tone...," "Tonal Men," "a general harmoniousness as to tone," "tonal landscape," "justice of tone," "warm in tone," "Mr. Inness, classed in respect to his color powers, must be considered as a tonalist...," "a golden tonality," "the tones of this watercolor," "it is fine in tone," "the 'tonal' school," "... all tonists," or to differentiate a "colorist" from a "tonalist."[8] By 1900 the terms "Tonalist" or "tonal" were used in contradistinction to Impressionism (often referred to as Luminism) or plein-air painting with its high-keyed broken facture produced out of doors in bright sunlight. Technically speaking, tone in color theory refers to a tint produced by adding white to a pure color, or a shade resulting from adding black to a pure color: color has been "toned up" or "toned down." This was the basis of the chiaroscuro style of painting invented by Leonardo da Vinci, taken up by the Renaissance masters, especially the Venetians—Giorgione, Giovanni Bellini, and Titian—and eventually Velásquez, the Spanish master so esteemed by La Farge, Inness, and Whistler, and any number of American Tonalists. Constable, Turner, Corot, and the Barbizon school are often cited by contemporary artists and critics as progenitors of the Tonalist school in America. In the broad tradition of Western art, the Tonalists come out of the colorist, or "colore," tradition of Venetian art as opposed to the "designo," the tradition of Florentine art, which emphasizes drawing or line.

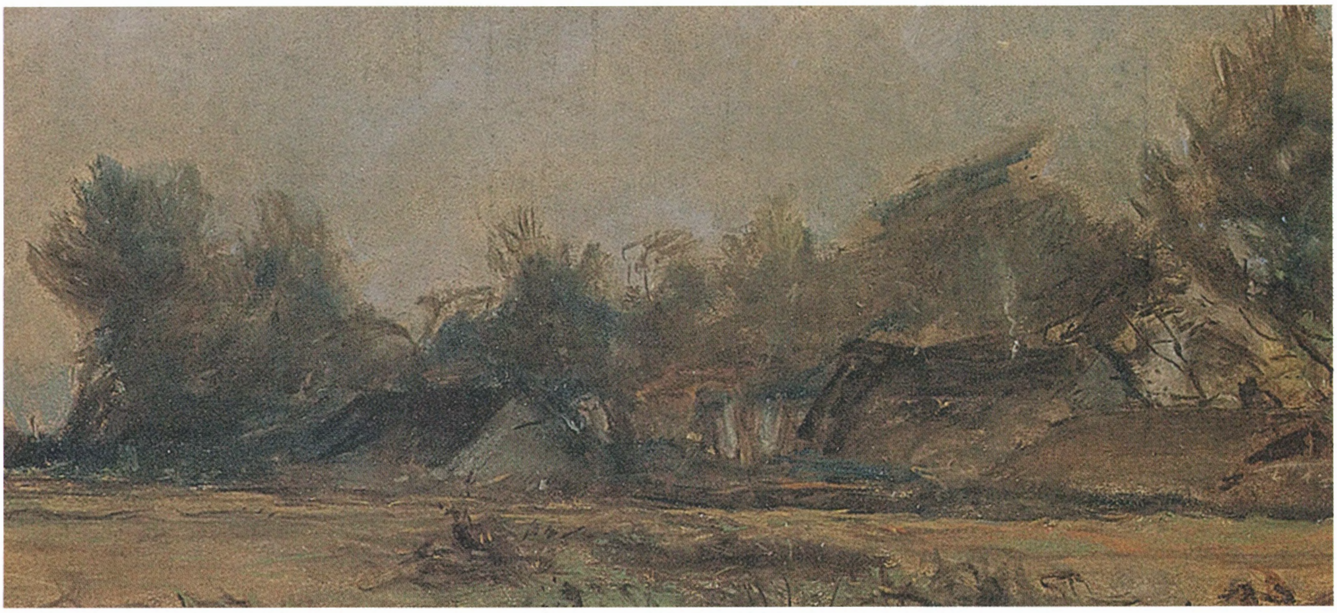
The term "Tonalism" generally applies to landscape art, including painting, watercolor, pastel, and etching. Landscapes make up the vast majority of subjects painted in a tonal style, a style characterized by the use of a low-toned palette consisting mostly of cool colors—earthy greens, blues, mauve, violet, black—and a range of intervening grays, colors considered poetic and suggestive. The suggestiveness of the style was partly achieved by the laying in of similar tones side by side, producing a sensation of refraction of subtly different hues, and by applying cool tones over a ground of warm color, effecting a feeling of vibration in the eye. In 1916, Bell described the delightful result in terms of texture: "It endows his [the Tonalist's] canvas lavishly with all sorts of riches; in one place there dreams the suggestion of a velvet emerald, in another that of a pigeon-blood ruby, and somewhere between the two nestles the mellowed translucency of mutton-fat jade; in seeming abandon, the souls of happy jewels are scattered with such consummate skill that is hard sometimes to believe that they are made of paint."[9] These and other techniques, including the use of colored glazes, which Bell compared to the rich properties of stained glass, impart an illusion of blurred movement—a visual equivalent of metamorphosis—and haunting reverie: this feeling of metamorphosis, of change and changelessness, lies at the metaphysical heart of the style. The ambiguity and uncertainty of this soft-edged art form led directly to modernist preoccupations about the nature of reality.

Though landscapes predominated, there were many painters who used a Tonalist palette to paint figures, urban scenes, and still lifes. The greatest exponents of figurative Tonalism, especially in the realm of portraiture, were James McNeill Whistler, Thomas Dewing, and William Merritt Chase, who followed Whistler's lead by veiling their subjects in immaterial tone. Whistler, Birge Harrison, Robert Henri, Charles Warren Eaton, and many others painted tonal urban scenes. Whistler's path-breaking Nocturnes, transformed the fog-shrouded Thames into enchanting dreamlike visions, while his minimalist tonal pastels and exquisite etchings of Venice would mold the vision of two generations of artists who produced their own spectral versions of the lagoon city. Birge Harrison painted snowy scenes of Quebec and fog-bound nocturnes of New York, while Robert Henri and Edward Redfield did the same in Paris and later New York, and Eaton painted moonlight nocturnes of Bruges. Birge's brother, Alexander Harrison, was an exponent of Tonalist marine scenes of such breathtaking beauty and refinement that he was lionized in Paris and credited with inventing the mode (including the naturalistic nude painted in outdoor light). John La Farge, J. Alden Weir, William Merritt Chase, and Emil Carlsen produced extraordinary tonal still lifes. But in terms of quantity, quality, and ultimate significance to American art, it is the Tonalist landscape that forms the leitmotif of the style. The most talented painters of the era gravitated to landscape, not simply because of the raw emotion it engendered, or even the expanding market for landscapes, but because landscape offered the most scope for imagination, innovation, and artistic growth: a distinctly American idiom.

The tonal landscape, especially in the late 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, when Whistler's initial influence was greatest, when his pastels and etchings of Venice were first seen in Boston and New York, tends to be small in size, intimate in character, depicting a nearby bucolic corner of nature. This early phase of Aesthetic Tonalism, with its emphasis on decorative values, charming pattern, quiet equilibrium, and graphic flattening of form, drew on, in addition to Whistler, the influence of Japanese art, the Aesthetic movement, and American artists like Thomas Dewing who taught advanced compositional styles at the Art Students League in the early 1880s. The taste for



J. Francis Murphy, *Indian Summer*, 1895 (detail of fig. 4.65).

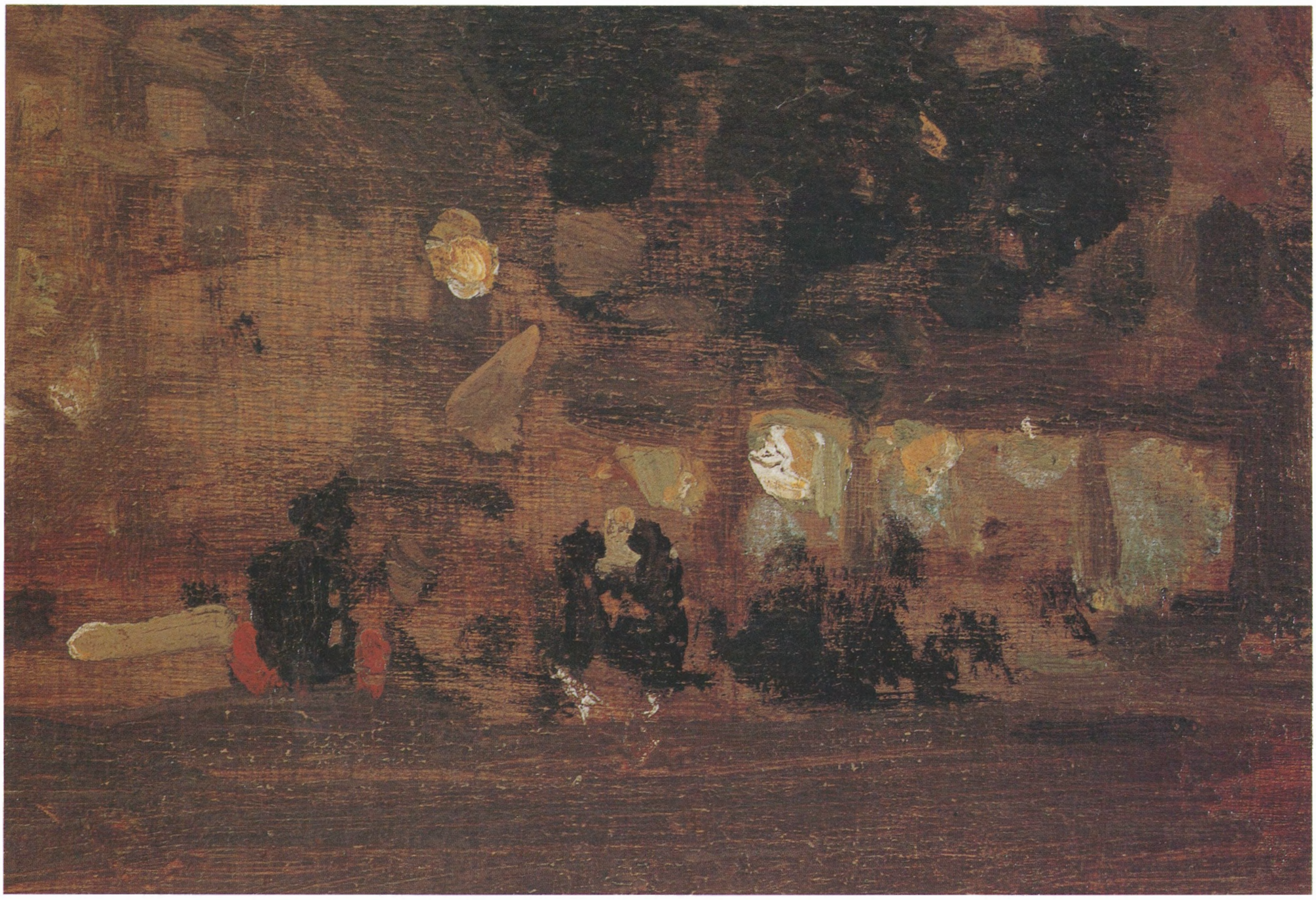


J. Frank Currier, *Landscape #59*, 1882 (detail of fig. 3.22).

intimacy and charm may have partly flowed from the tradition of small sketches executed by Hudson River School artists, and certainly had precedent in the small-scale studies from nature painted by French Barbizon artists. The great avatar of American Tonalism and the New England Transcendentalist tradition, William Morris Hunt, on his return from studying with Millet in 1855, instilled in sophisticated Boston art circles a taste for painterly values and broadly massed forms on an intimate scale characteristic of Barbizon landscapes. Both by example and in his teaching, Hunt stressed proportion, values (areas of light and dark), simplicity of expression, and parsimony of detail so as to give the composition visual impact. "Your work may be called monotonous; but one tone is better than many which do not harmonize,"[10] as he noted in his enormously influential *Talks on Art*, a collection of Hunt's exhortations to his students, which quickly become the Tonalist gospel after its publication in 1878. "We begin with the study of 'values' in order more readily to get the power of expressing the roundness and fullness of objects, the effect of light and shadow, and the mystery and distance of atmosphere."[11] It was Hunt's most famous pupil, John La Farge, in his extraordinary small landscapes of the 1860s, who seemingly created the style full-blown with relatively little foreign training and only Hunt's example to guide him. La Farge's precocious and scintillating panels of activated tone set along Narragansett Bay and the family's Long Island retreat are less about place and more about mood and ephemeral light. Most of La Farge's landscape gems, displaying both a sensuous charm and precocious sensitivity to cool color, were sold into Boston collections in the 1870s and set the mode for Tonalism as a peculiarly New England style. Scenes of rural New England were favored by collectors, along with the depiction of the passing of dusk into night, subjects sophisticated in execution yet deceptively naïve and romantic—the poetry of the everyday invoked by the artist to express feeling in paint and stir an emotion in the viewer.

Inness, too, maintained ties to Boston circles in the 1860s and 1870s where the post-Barbizon styles of American landscape found fertile ground, especially among those who had early appreciated the abstract and decorative qualities of Japanese art. In 1878, George Inness published his manifesto, which defined the quintessence of Tonalism for a generation. "A work of art does not appeal to the intellect. It does not appeal to the moral sense. Its aim is not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion . . . and the true beauty of the work consists in the beauty of the sentiment or emotion which it inspires . . . the quality and the force of this emotion."[12]

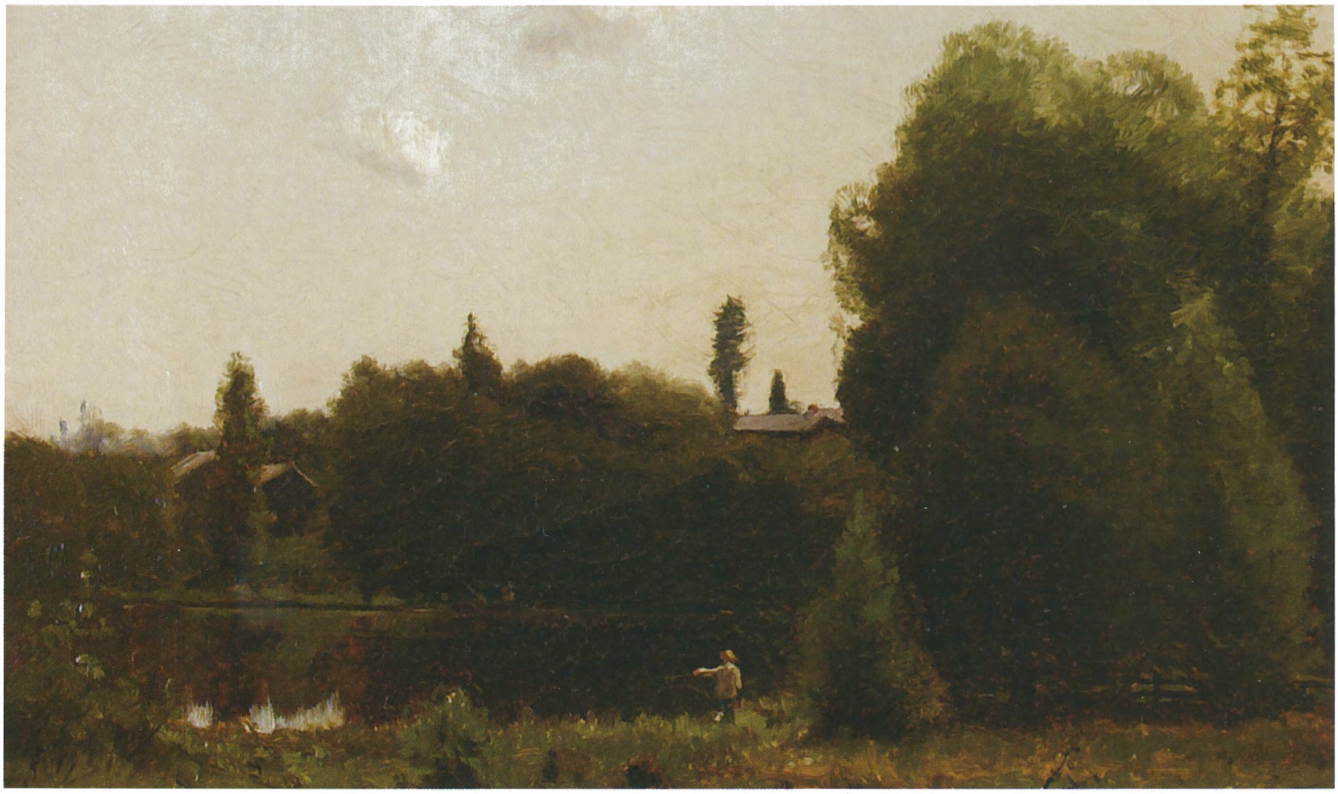
Unlike the panoramic and detailed views of specific places favored by the Hudson River School, Inness, in his late work of the 1880s and 1890s, along with his followers, painted landscapes that were more constrained in field and generalized, often just a glimpse of a copse, a portion of a field or meadow, the edge of a wood or a tiny clearing, or a patch of gentle hillside: here the bare remnants of an old road, there the tumbled fieldstone wall of a defunct farmyard, and on the near horizon a remaining stand of first growth white pine or an ancient oak. These are human landscapes, civilized landscapes, in Inness's phrase—yet generally lacking figures (Inness, a first-generation Tonalist, never quite gave up on the figurative note in his landscapes), lest a narrative element interfere with the purity of solitude necessary for contemplation. This ostracizing of the figure is rooted in a Puritan iconoclasm found both in Emerson's Transcendentalist ideas and Whistler's modernist non-narrative abstraction. Or as Thoreau observed as he gazed over a meadow at a November sunset, ". . . we were only motes in its beams." Abandoned farms, rural outskirts of villages, or near-at-home places cheek-by-jowl with nature were the preferred subjects, where the unspoiled landscape—far from the madding crowd of urban life—can be enjoyed firsthand. These are places of escape and wonder first elucidated in the writings of Thoreau and dreamed about by city dwellers.



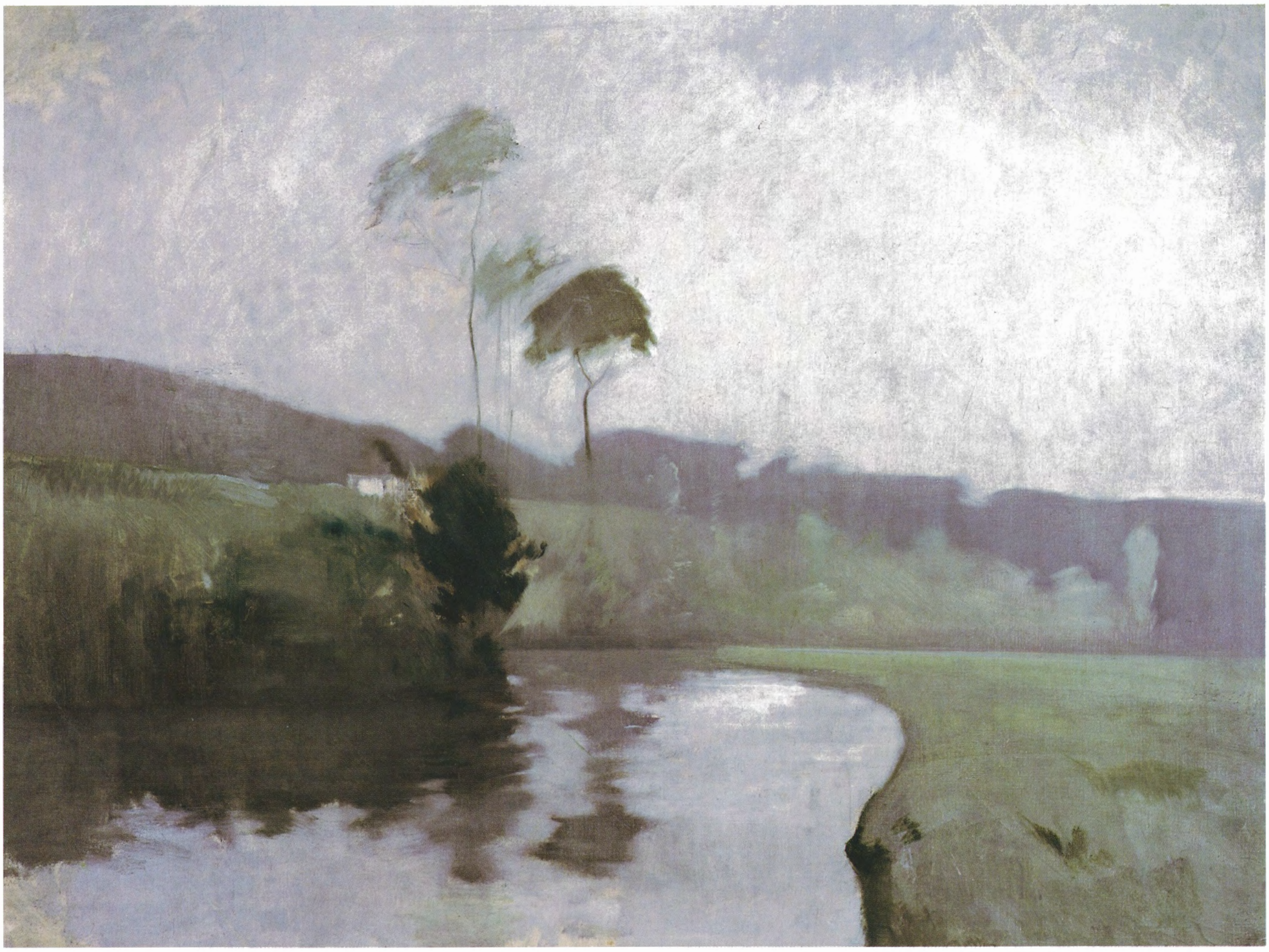
Robert Henri, *Nocturne Café*, c. 1900 (detail of fig. 8.48).

Most of the near-iconic precincts of Tonalism lie within easy commuting distance of a major metropolitan area: the raw hillsides of the Catskills, the gentle farms of Long Island, old stone walls and haggard orchards around Greenwich or Old Lyme on the Connecticut coast, sea-misted cypresses in the Carmel/Monterey area north of San Francisco, or across the Hudson River from New York in Bloomfield, Montclair, and Nutley, New Jersey, where George Inness, Charles Warren Eaton, Arthur Hoeber—and Ralph Albert Blakelock in nearby East Orange—set up studios and savored a fading rural world of faltering farms and overgrown pastures. And of course, Whistler had his fog-shrouded Thames ever hovering beyond his Chelsea windows, even as his dematerialized scenes of Venice spread his minimalist vision throughout the art world.

The Tonalist feeling for subdued light evolved from a number of sources. The microclimate of the European painting grounds engendered among the American expatriate landscapists a preference for overcast light (the cloudy summers and pearl gray skies along the coast in Brittany and Holland), and for simplification as a means to enhancing the expressive power of their art. Feeling-charged pigment of subtle tonality, whether delicately applied or with impetuous impasto, became the preferred mode. When they returned to America, the expatriates gravitated to similar scenes and lighting conditions, especially along the coast and the moist, foggy atmosphere near the sea, where the muted harmonies of the landscape rang most true. Thus the Tonalist season is often fall or winter, the time is mostly dawn or sunset, especially the twilight gloaming, in the minutes when the sun has slipped the horizon, when the natural light has softened and local color is enhanced—paradoxically, when the various earth tones, especially the various greens, become more distinct and vibrant. In the half-light, detail melts away and only the larger forms and masses remain, the various half- and quartertones describing a mysterious harmony—a fragile enchantment to challenge the artist and beguile the eye of his patron. From Hunt to Inness to Twachtman and J. Francis Murphy, value and form were stressed over line and detail. Tonalism became an art of omission and evasion, of the elimination of unwanted or distracting detail, revealing the essence of matter. Weeding out niggling detail, landforms are emphasized, while trees and rocks and pools become actors in the mind's eye. In turn, the viewer is tantalized by vibrating tones and indistinct silhouettes, not to mention the sinuous pigment itself. Amorphous soft-edged forms predominate: nothing is quite as it seems. Metamorphosis, the idea and reality, is translated from sources in Ovid and Darwin to become an active presence in the Tonalist picture, tantalizing both the eye and imagination. The resulting natural ensembles, such as silhouetted trees, indistinct patterns of rocky outcroppings, and the counterpoint of hard and soft forms create a peculiar, and often indescribable, symbolic energy. Tonalist landscapes reflect moments of memory regained and then lost; as such, they shift, elide, and transform before the eye and never find



Charles Harry Eaton, *Summer Days*, c. 1885 (detail of fig. 6.47).

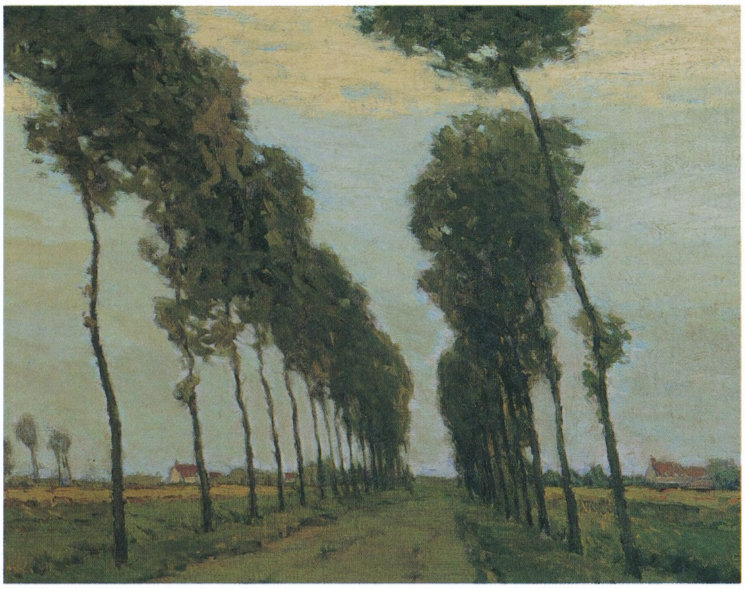


John Henry Twachtman, *Springtime*, c. 1884. Oil on canvas, 36⅞ x 50 in. Cincinnati Art Museum. Gift of Frank Duveneck.

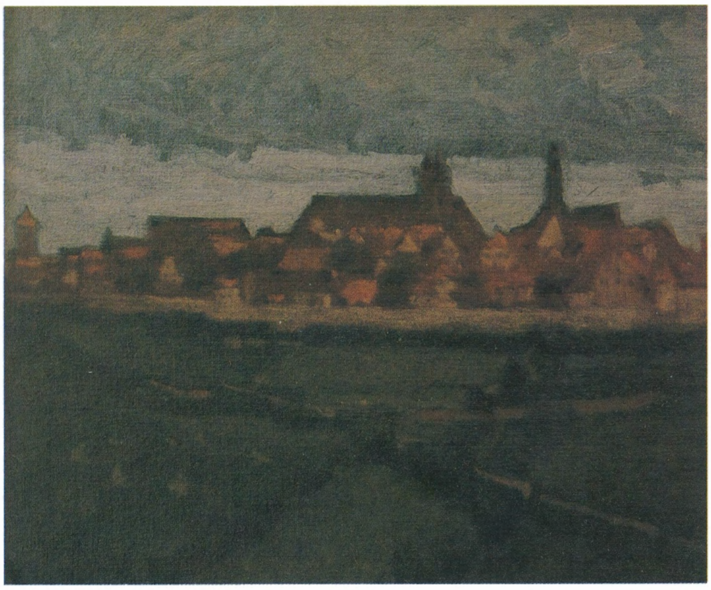
complete resolution. It is these added dimensions of memory that make the greatest Tonalist landscapes not just haunting, but revealing of new insights upon repeated viewings. Memory, as emotion recalled in solitude and as a technical resource, is a key component in the rich suggestiveness of the Tonalist mode. As chapter 7 will show, the Tonalist landscape *is* memory incarnate.

In summary, the stylistic characteristics of Tonalism comprise eleven visual components or visual emotions: 1) use of subtle color tones coprised of various greens, purples, blues, and grays that are restful and easy on the eye; 2) a stress on symbolic form over narrative; 3) the depiction of atmosphere (the unseen air); 4) a sense of movement or metamorphosis in nature (the vibration and refraction of tones); 5) the use of expressive paint handling to embody emotion or mimic the felt-life of nature; 6) the employment of formal strategies of embedded patterns and the decorative deployment of natural and abstract forms; 7) the use of soft-edged forms to further the sense of ambiguity, uncertainty, and mystery of place (known as lost-edge technique in the nineteenth century); 8) an emphasis on the broad, graphic, ultimately abstract reading of major forms, producing an immediacy of emotional response to paintings, especially at a distance; 9) an emphasis on the elegiac poetry of landscape (reflecting the trauma of the Civil War); 10) the portrayal of a mystical organic relationship between perceiver and the perceived; and 11) an intimate landscape art of solitude, silence, and memory that taps into innate and adaptive spiritual needs. As will be seen, in the 1880s Aesthetic Tonalism, with its emphasis on pattern, decoration, and balance, gradually gave way to a more Expressive Tonalism around 1900, which emphasized gestural facture, larger-size works, and a concentration on fewer and simpler symbolic forms so as to project greater emotional power and immediacy of visual impact.

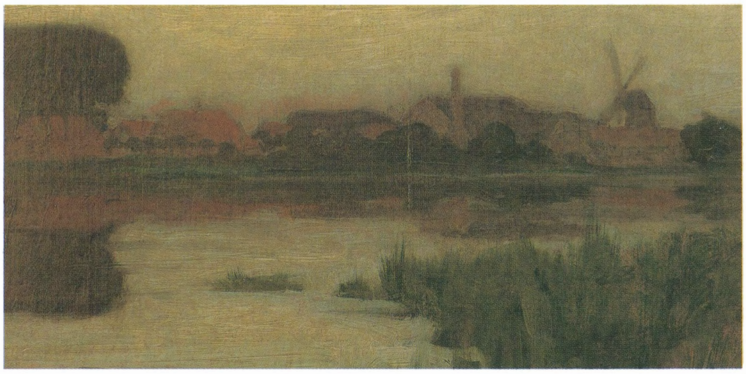
As a style, Tonalism was embedded in the arts and culture of the day, along with Tiffany stained-glass windows and lamps. The act of composition and selection of tones was understood to be similar to the experience of musical harmony, the resulting counterpoint of color tones effecting emotions similar to that of music. Artists from Whistler on were well versed in the musical analogies and the underlying abstract appeal of both arts: Whistler used such musical terms as harmony, arrangement, and symphony as titles for his work. He extolled



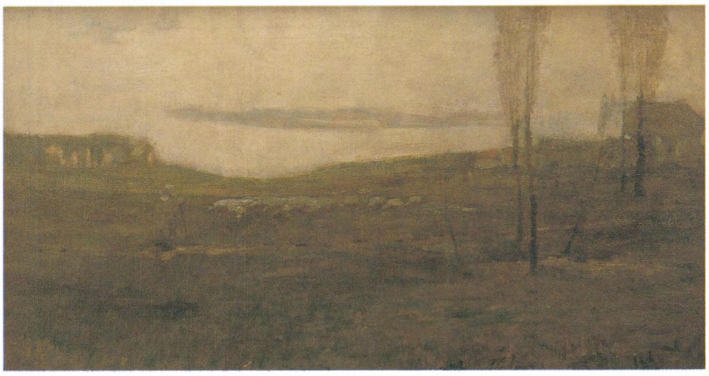
Charles Warren Eaton, *The Road to Sluis, Holland*, c. 1910 (detail of fig. 7.26).



Henry Snell, *Rainy Town*, c. 1900. Oil on board, 10 x 13 in. Private collection.



Hermann Dudley Murphy, *Dutch Nocturne*, c. 1900 (detail of fig. 8.54).



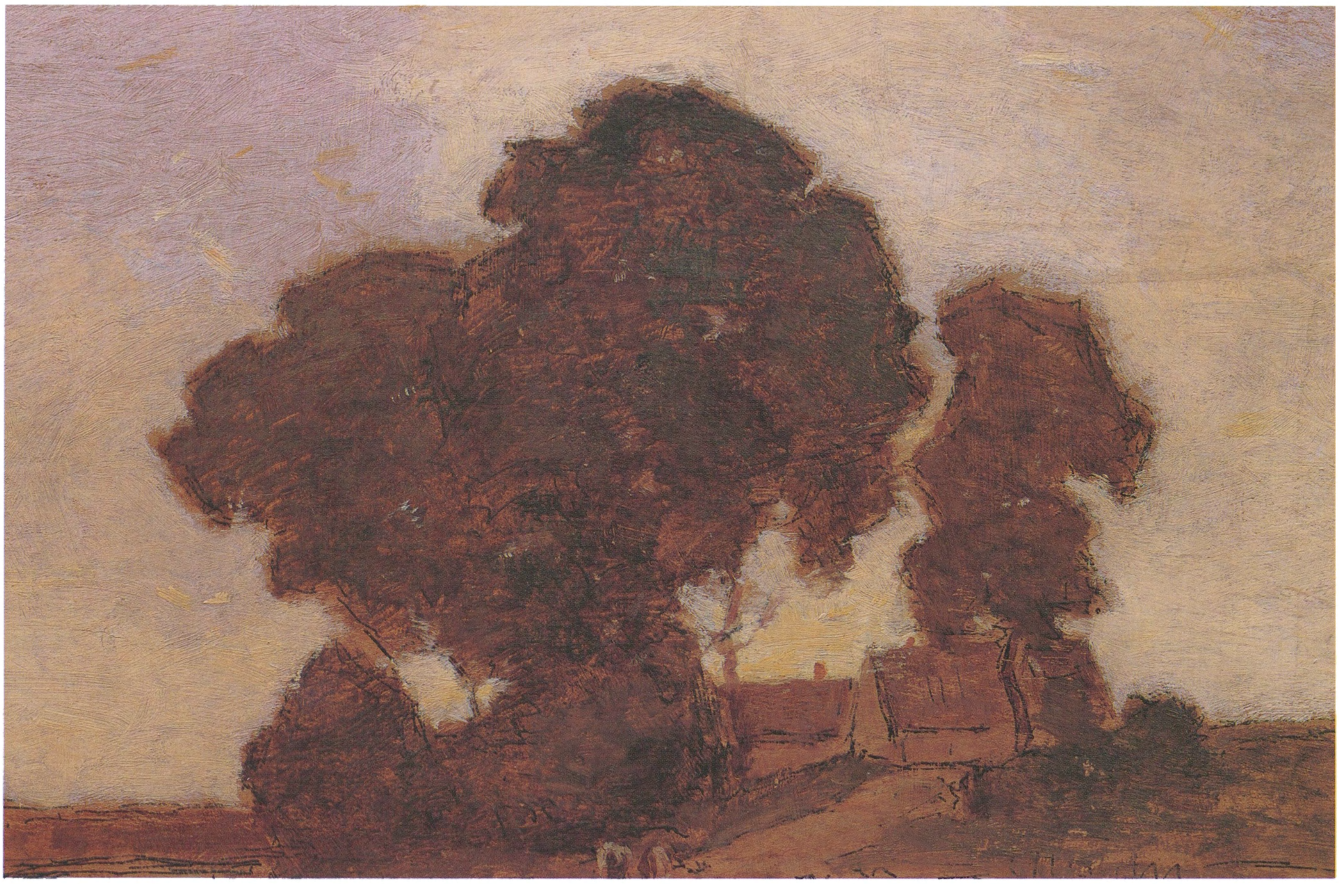
Chauncey Ryder, *French Landscape*, c. 1905 (detail of fig. 4.16).

the role of the artist in mastering nature. It was the artist, not nature, as Whistler liked to observe, who brought about the triumph of artistic perfection by redesigning the visual world for decorative and suggestive effect. "But the artist is born to pick, and chose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful—as the musician gathers his notes, and forms his chords, until he bring forth from chaos glorious harmony."[13] Emerson and Thoreau in their own way were as assertive as Whistler in proclaiming man's priority as the ultimate visualizer of nature. This transcendentalist subjectivity—in which man's mysterious experience of nature counts for more than the objective reality observed—so central to the writings of Thoreau and Emerson, is fully embodied in the Tonalist landscape. Creator and creation have become one.

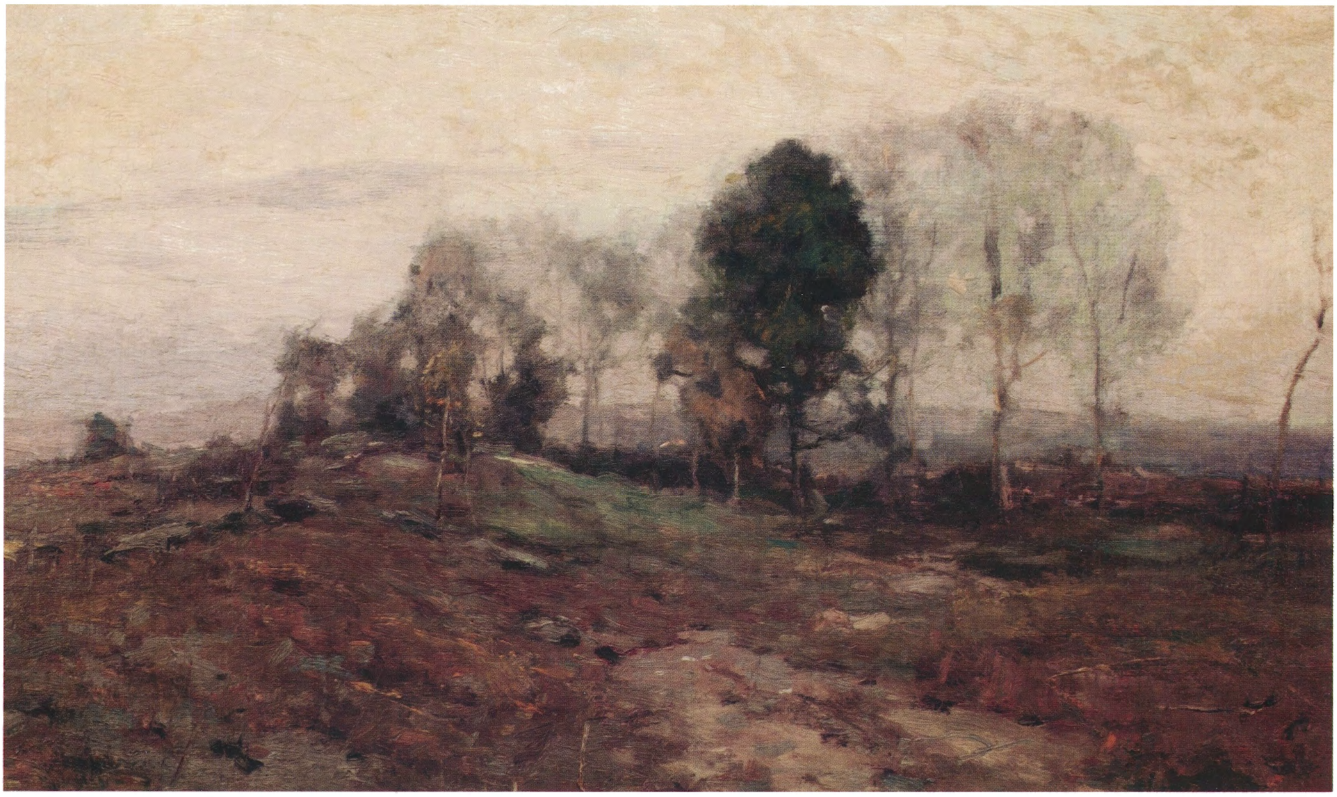
The misreading of Tonalism's essentially avant-garde pedigree has much to do with the mistaken critique that it was derivative, a post-Barbizon style and thus old-fashioned. It would be almost impossible today to confuse a French Barbizon landscape with an American Tonalist landscape: perspective, style, and compositional modes are quite distinct. Whistler's influence in the early 1880s, much less that of Japanese art and the Aesthetic movement, resulted in stylization of the Tonalist landscape, employing embedded patterns, flattened forms, cropped perspectives, and, for the most part, the elimination of figures or narrative detail. By the end of the 1880s, the Tonalist landscape by its best exponents had an unmistakably American look. This Whistlerian or decorative aspect of American Tonalism was duly noted by Bell, who wrote of the Tonalists' "sensuous swing and play of broken colours, which are wedded to such delightful designs and pleasing patterns that they neither seem like designs nor yet suggest patterns. So agreeably are all the parts connected that they are seen only together; fused in a nice relation to the whole ... the deft methods of harmony, so cunningly wrought that the production is as free from the moans of labour, as the gently swaying boughs of a tree or the happy waters of a lazy brook."[14] The Americans tended to work in the studio from memory, adjusting their compositions along synthetic lines to gain subtle harmonies of design and a breathless equilibrium. The Barbizon School artists, also known as the men of 1830, with the exception of Corot, tended to use darker grounds (many of which have deteriorated) and thus lack the atmospheric vibration and refraction of adjacent tones, and the mysterious blurred edges found in so many Tonalist works. Expressive Tonalism, from the 1890s on, is even more distinct, with an expressive gestural handling of paint and emphasis on nocturnes and symbolic content rarely found in Barbizon painting. The American expatriates assiduously ransacked the technical resources of their old-world bloodline but only occasionally—certainly not the great talents—copied out of whole cloth.

When the Americans did borrow, the influence tended to be short-lived and quickly merged with a broader stylistic synthesis back on American shores. The rediscovery of Velásquez by such expatriates as Whistler, Chase, and Currier is a perfect example. The vogue for Velásquez—often described as a Tonalist in period scholarship—directed the Americans to low-toned compositions in which slight variations of tone were meticulously noted to produce both a sense of real light and vibration: a palpable atmospheric envelope. This was a technique Whistler exploited to the full, especially in his figurative work. Of more recent vintage, the English painter John Constable was, according to Tonalist Birge Harrison, the first to record the pearly gray out-of-doors light in a faithful manner, exploiting the full gamut of grays, mauves, and lilacs in broadly painted masses. Constable's example had a profound influence on French Barbizon painters who recognized the Englishman's truth-to-nature observations, and the purity and simplicity of his style freed from traditional formulas of academic representation. It was this style of handling, the sketchy, more generalized effects of paint application handed down from Constable to Barbizon artists Camille Corot, Charles-François Daugbigny, Narcisse Diaz, and Theodore Rousseau, which Americans like Inness, William Morris Hunt, and John La Farge developed in their early work, and then moved on. Perhaps even more important in the early development of Tonalism was the meteoric rise and fall of the French artist Jules Bastien-Lepage. Lepage's naturalism had enormous influence on Americans working in France, especially Brittany—probably more than the academic art taught in the Parisian schools in the late 1870s. Lepage's naturalist style, sometimes close to photographic realism, especially in the depth of cool crystalline atmosphere and high horizons of his compositions, found resonance with the Harrison brothers and J. Alden Weir, and was a strong presence in the early years of the Society of American Artists in the 1880s.

Another profound influence was the painterly style of the Munich School. Munich's most important American acolytes, J. Frank Currier, Frank Duveneck, John Twachtman, Henry Muhrman, William Gedney Bunce, and William Merritt Chase, introduced the expressive brushstroke and a new freedom of form into the Tonalist movement at a crucial juncture in its development during the late 1870s and early



Frederick W. Kost, *Sunset on the James*, c. 1910 (detail of fig. 7.21).

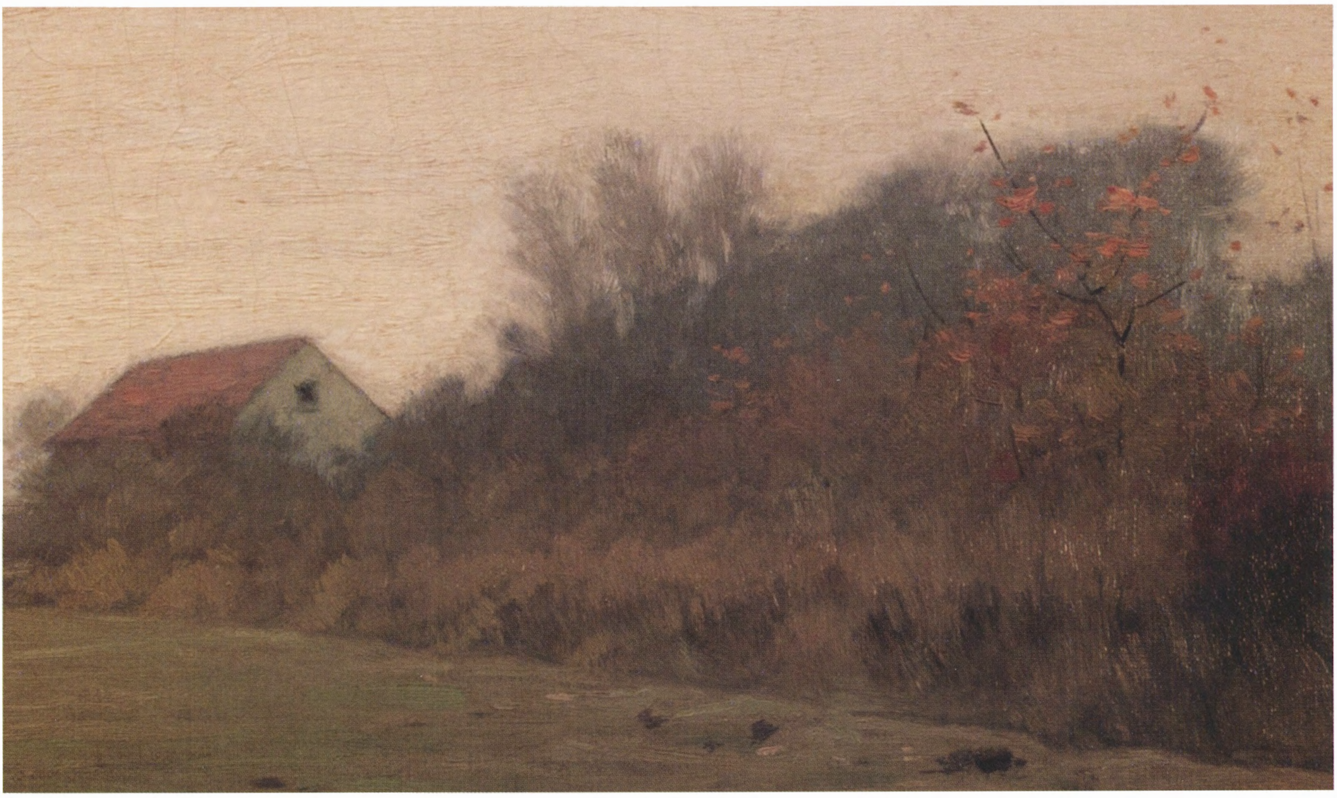


Chauncey Ryder, *Road to Francistown*, c. 1910 (detail of fig. 7.25).

1880s. Munich-style expressive facture, which had been derived from old master sources in Velásquez and Hals, faded in the 1880s—merging with the wider stylistic stream of American painting—only to make a comeback by 1900 with painters like Henri, Redfield, and Bellows and their vigorous use of pigment.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the greatest of the Tonalist painters were those who largely eschewed French academic modes, or who were able to take just enough of their academic training—Dwight Tryon, John Twachtman, and Birge Harrison are prominent examples—to impart a useful technical competence, but no more. Ironically, more influential in the development of Tonalist style was the expatriate's exposure to the soft atmospheric weather and landscapes of the American art colonies in Brittany, much less the beneficial cross-fertilization that took place within the American expatriate communities. The experience of plein-air painting under cloudy European skies, especially on the coast of Brittany and along the waterways of Holland probably contributed more to the look and feel of Tonalism than all the years of studious academic work in the Parisian ateliers. This subdued natural light found in their European haunts, especially the scintillating effects of reflected sunlight off water passing through misty atmosphere, seems to have imprinted itself like an afterglow in the work of the expatriates long after their return home. In the 1880s and into the 1890s, Americans like John Twachtman, Charles Platt, Arthur Hoeber, Hugh Bolton Jones, Birge Harrison, and Leonard Ochtman continued to fill their landscapes with a silvery-white simmering tonality, a lingering and persistent memory of student days in Brittany and elsewhere.

Tonalist landscape painter Birge Harrison, writing on the art of landscape in 1912, described what he considered the fundamental contribution of the Tonalist school to the history of landscape, and particularly the technical advances that distinguished Tonalism from earlier Barbizon methods and Impressionist broken facture. The true depiction of natural light, Harrison claimed, depended on two crucial technical innovations made by his generation: vibration, cool overtones applied over warm undertones, and refraction, complementary tones placed side by side on the canvas to give the effect of pulsing light and movement. This was also referred to as the "blurred-edge" technique, in which forms outside the central point of observation lose definition and detail. Harrison drew a distinction between the Tonalist method of describing natural light, in which sentiment and poetry is the object, and the Impressionist means, in which primary colors are laid in side by side on canvas, thus allowing the eye to blend the colors at a distance, producing a quasi-scientific effect: the momentary dazzle of bright light. Harrison and many of his Tonalist colleagues found "classic" Impressionism as practiced by Monet and Renoir at Argenteuil in 1873–74 to be too scientific and mechanical for their tastes, but perhaps more to the point,



Birge Harrison, *Woodstock Farm*, c. 1908 (detail of fig. 8.76).

they considered it a foreign import that went against the grain of American taste for an art spiritual in character and expressive of individual feeling.

Tonalism was never a static movement between 1880 and 1910, and its formal and abstract elements always endowed it with a dynamism that prompted its evolution, transforming the style in new and unexpected ways. Its methods and preoccupations would appear in various guises as fresh talents found inspiration in its rarefied precincts. Broadly stated, the style evolved from the intimate, precious, small scale, and charming landscapes of the 1880s—Aesthetic Tonalism—to more broadly painted and suggestive renditions of mood and atmosphere in the late 1890s—Expressive Tonalism—until by 1900 and the first decade of the century the Tonalists filled larger canvases, emphasizing both decorative patterning and the gestural brushstroke, and nocturnal and symbolic subject matter, reflecting the influence of international fin-de-siècle styles such as Symbolism and Art Nouveau. Tonalism's truest bloodline, however, remains the New England Transcendentalist tradition—the subjective eye—as embodied in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau. It is this interdependent relationship of man and nature, a relationship in which the artist interprets the visual world through the alembic of the imagination and memory, often eliciting spiritual insights, both personal and universal, that remains the enduring birthright of Tonalism.

Introduction to the Third Edition

I AM ONLY TOO PLEASED to find myself embarking on a new introduction for yet another—the third—edition of my book *A History of American Tonalism 1880–1920: Crucible of American Modernism,* now to be published by Abbeville Press. Not only did the first edition of nearly five thousand copies sell out in under two years, but the demand for the second edition has remained strong as well, prompting a third edition and this new introduction, which includes more than one hundred new images (available for viewing on artsy.net). I'm gratified as well by the overwhelmingly positive response from critics and readers to the first and second editions, which justified my belief that this essential and misunderstood period in American art history was long overdue for a complete reappraisal. When I initially embarked on the first edition, I did so with some trepidation, since the field was such a complete tabula rasa, and there were few guideposts to elucidating the lost world of the American Tonalists. To do so required not just access to artworks, many gone missing for nearly a century, and period documentation (abetted by the Google revolution) on the art and artists that formed the Tonalist movement, but also a leap of faith informed by a hard-won intuition about the quality and distinctiveness—as well as the sheer ubiquity—of Tonalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America and the fundamentally progressive nature of the Tonalist movement. These initial suppositions, gathered over decades of research, proved out in spades upon closer examination—surpassing my expectations at every turning—and provided the critical armature to flesh out the history of the Tonalist movement in a systematic and coherent narrative.

Now, over a decade later, thanks to new exhibitions and scholarship, and even more artworks coming to light, the original thesis of the *History* has been reconfirmed: the Tonalist movement between 1880 and 1920 comprised the best and most progressive American artists of the age and set the groundwork for everything we think of today as modernism. What was once a cloudy picture of great accomplishment by a handful of master artists whose reputations had survived the watershed of tastes in the 1920s—James Abbott McNeill Whistler, George Inness, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Ralph Albert Blakelock, and Dwight Tryon, to name a few—has been clarified, and the field of artists increased by at least two score. The excellence of these artists' achievements has become increasingly apparent as more artworks come to light and exhibitions, in the United States and abroad,[1] contextualize the full scope of the Tonalist movement—a movement that reverberates across the cultural landscape from the domestic architecture of Henry Richardson and Frank Lloyd Wright, to works of such writers as Henry and William James, Willa Cather, and Edgar Allan Poe, and even to the decorative arts encompassed by the Arts and Crafts movement. Much of this cultural background was, at least, touched on in the first edition. Further accumulating evidence only fortifies my conviction that American Tonalism is *the* essential American aesthetic, constituting a foundational birthright for the cultural life of the nation in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century, a movement essentially dynamic and innovative in spirit, upon which future generations would draw time and time again. Just recently, enthusiasm for Tonalism reached a new milestone with the formation of the American Tonalist Society, a superbly talented group of like-minded contemporary artists who have joined together to further the heritage of their progenitors while helping to educate the public about the spiritual felicities of Tonalism. Working under the inspiration of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the ATS and legions of other contemporary Tonalists have hearkened to the Transcendentalist spirit underpinning the style; they have expanded upon and deepened the tradition to paint landscapes full of reverie and soul, tapping into a spiritual hunger among a younger generation searching for its roots in both time and place.

What has truly surprised me since the first edition are the pathbreaking exhibitions and scholarship that have thrown more light on American Tonalism's impact on the international art scene, much of it by virtue of its greatest exponent, James Abbott McNeill Whistler. The first edition of *A History of American Tonalism* made clear the enormous and early influence of Whistler in the American art world from the late 1870s on but made less note of the artist's dramatic sway over two generations of European artists, including Claude Monet, Edgar Degas, Odilon Redon, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, and a host of others, including Pablo Picasso in his Blue Period. Such growing evidence of Whistler's influence on the international art scene from the 1880s through the First World War[2] suggests that American Tonalism can now be better understood both as a radical American art form and as an aesthetic mode that

OPPOSITE: Charles Harry Eaton, *Summer Song,* c. 1890 (detail of fig. 49).

contributed to post-Impressionist trends in the wider international art world, with Whistler playing an essential role in both. Recent scholarship and exhibitions on the once underappreciated Tonalist landscapes of Degas[3] from the 1890s, which share an extraordinary affinity to work by Whistler and the American Tonalists of the same era, have enlarged our understanding of the nexus of American Tonalism and post-Impressionism. With this new perspective, the contributions of American Tonalism—especially in the works of its most inventive and radical lights—to post-Impressionist energies will rightfully place the movement on the cutting edge of innovation in the international arena. Such clarification further redresses the long-held misconception that turn-of-the-century American art was a second-rate, hidebound, if not derivative, post-Barbizon school compared to the more progressive European art. This more balanced view will do much to demonstrate how both European *and* indigenous sources played an essential role in the formation of the great flowering of modernism in America from the era of the 1913 Armory Show and the circle of Alfred Stieglitz—including Georgia O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, and Marsden Hartley—to Milton Avery and the breakthrough of the Abstract Expressionists (Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman), followed by the Color Field school of Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, and the late Wolf Kahn, and the thousands of contemporary Tonalists who still draw inspiration from Whistler. To this bloodline, fully mapped out in the first edition, a fuller appreciation of Whistler's towering international presence only adds color and detail. And, as will be discussed below, the influence of Edgar Allan Poe on Whistler and a range of French artists and writers of the period was something that entirely escaped me ten years ago—a synergy between the literary and artistic worlds that provides yet another window into the past and the emerging picture of Whistler's ubiquitous genius.

Many have asked what has changed in my thinking about Tonalism over the past decade: Have I discovered any new artists of the period overlooked in the first edition? The answer is yes, one gentle and masterful artist, yet another friend and acolyte of Whistler, Clifford Addams (see figs. 92–96), who was not just a fine painter but possibly one of the greatest Tonalist etchers of the pre–World War II period, and certainly the most whimsical and imaginative. Addams provides yet another example of how the Tonalist style can be deftly and effectively applied across media and to subjects other than landscape. In terms of lesser-known artists discussed in the first edition, my admiration for the likes of Franklin De Haven, Charles Melville Dewey, Charles Harry Eaton, Charles Warren Eaton, Ben Foster, J. Francis Murphy, J. Frank Currier, William Gedney Bunce, Henry Muhrman, Leonard Ochtman, and Walter Nettleton, to name a few, has only grown with greater familiarity, as more of their finest artworks have come to light. In my estimation, Dewey, both Eatons, Foster, Murphy, and Ochtman will eventually take their place with George Inness as major lights of the Tonalist movement and in the pantheon of some of the very best artists America has ever produced.

Many readers of the first edition contacted me to remark on my enumeration in the original introduction of eleven stylistic characteristics of American Tonalism, suggesting further elaboration. On reflection, I've now increased the number of characteristics to twelve, adding an illustrative discussion of *Aesthetic* and *Expressive* Tonalism, two foundational stylistic modes that evolved over the forty-odd years when Tonalism was at its height. The more detailed discussion of these fundamentals will, I hope, prove beneficial to the reader, along with the discussion of Whistler and Poe, Degas and Marcel Proust that follows. For the new reader, this discussion provides a concise summary of the Tonalist movement, illustrated with 113 images not included in the first and second editions. Some readers may prefer to skip to chapter one and return to the twelve-part delineation later with a more detailed history of American Tonalism under their belt.

Lastly, I want to thank David Fabricant, publisher of Abbeville, for his faith in and support for the third edition; and our fabulous designer and editor, Christopher Kuntze and Amy K. Hughes; their hard work and rare talents made the pages before you both beautiful and a pleasure to read.

THE TWELVE CHARACTERISTICS OF TONALISM

These twelve characteristics of American Tonalism rarely if ever operated in isolation from one another; rather the opposite was true: in most cases, several of or even all the characteristics can be seen to function seamlessly in a single work, whereby the emotional emphasis of the painting is tempered by the artistic choices among and balance between these various technical/stylistic options. More to the point, there is clearly overlap and blurring of affinities, just as in any work of art employing a range of colors that bleed and blend one into the other. Nevertheless, it is useful to try to tease out these various technical and stylistic strains, because doing so adds to our understanding of how artistic choices shaped the Tonalist aesthetic and, most especially, of the progressive nature of Tonalism and the deep cultural roots out of which the movement developed. Lastly, by systematically enumerating these characteristics, the synergy between them is grasped more concretely, a synergy that is further galvanized by the qualitative and cumulative technical choices made by individual artists, each with their unique strengths and proclivities. I might further suggest that a familiarity with these twelve characteristics—almost all, without exception, fundamental to the modernist canon—will go a long way to educating young people about the historical bloodlines of contemporary art, especially contemporary Tonalism, and so better connect them to the deeper heritage of art history. Such an appreciation and understanding and—dare I say it—level of connoisseurship are sorely lacking among today's collectors, who, in many cases, have become overly dependent on digital images of artwork—quickly summoned and just as quickly dismissed—rather than long sessions of sweet silent thought given over to contemplating actual artworks and so fathoming their infinite complexity and the hard-won skills and singular visions of their creators.

1. The use of subtle color tones comprising various greens, purples, blues, grays, and whites that are harmonious, tranquil, restful, quiet, and easy on the eye

> *Color ought to be, as it were, embroidered on the canvas, that is to say, the same colors ought to appear in the picture continually here and there, in the same way that a thread appears in an embroidery, here and there, and so should all the others, more or less according to their importance; in this way, the whole will form a harmony. They [the Japanese] never look for the contrast, on the contrary, they're after repetition.*
>
> James McNeill Whistler to Henri Fantin-Latour, 1868

The most obvious artistic strategy of the Tonalists, as the name implies, was the use of a subtle range of similar color tones on the scale between red and blue and yellow, including a range of whites, to produce a sensation that is quiet, cool, peaceful—a harmony conducive to reverie. These subdued earth and sky tones, with admixtures of grays, blacks, and whites sometimes verging on monochrome, have the salutatory effect, like black-and-white photography, of highlighting or dramatizing the basic components of the composition and so emphasizing the abstract and symbolic quality of natural forms. Whistler's example, as in so many aspects of Tonalist style and techniques, is paramount. Already by the 1880s the term "Tonalist" was being widely applied in period reviews to characterize the innovations of a new school of American artists that had superseded the older Hudson River School, with its emphasis on the panoramic and grandiose. An 1890 review of the work of Hudson River School artist Worthington Whittredge employs the term: "Or take No. 60, *The Valley Farm*, which in subject inclines to the panoramic like the old school work. But the spirit is the spirit of the tonalists of today."[4] As will be discussed in more detail below, Whistler was influenced early by the poetry and other writings of Edgar Allan Poe, who advocated the technique of repetition of words or phrases in poetry, a repetition of sounds that, in effect, established a certain tonality or feeling. Whistler adopted this idea and elaborated upon it, establishing a predominant color in his paintings (see *Symphony in White, No. 1*, and *Grey and Silver*, figs. 103 and 104) as a way of creating a certain mood, while also establishing an overall harmony and providing a uniform atmospheric envelope to the composition.

Henry Golden Dearth's prizewinning painting *The Deerfield Valley*, 1892 (fig. 1),[5] perfectly illustrates the way a predominant tone of green, here repeated and varied throughout the broad horizontals of the composition, creates an overall sense of

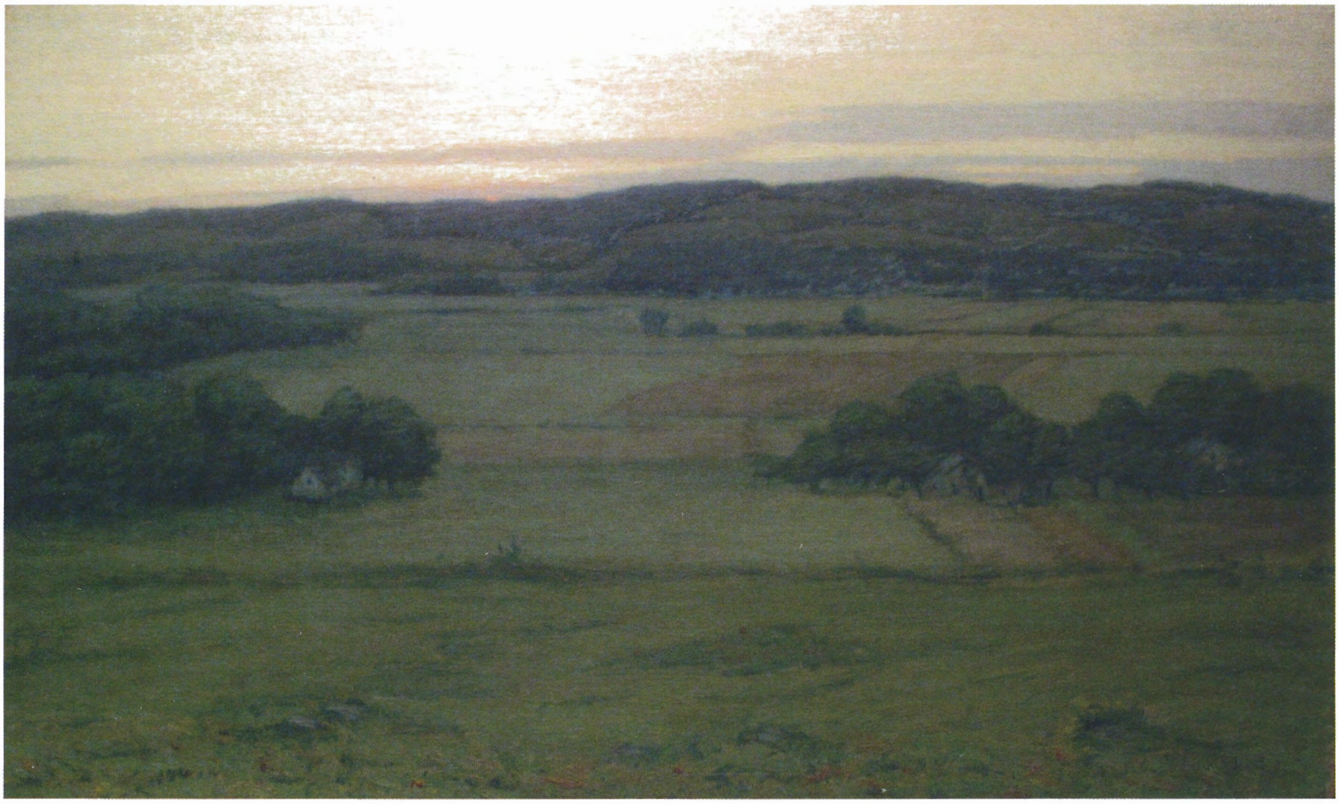


Fig. 1. Henry Golden Dearth, *The Deerfield Valley*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 24 x 40 in. Private collection.

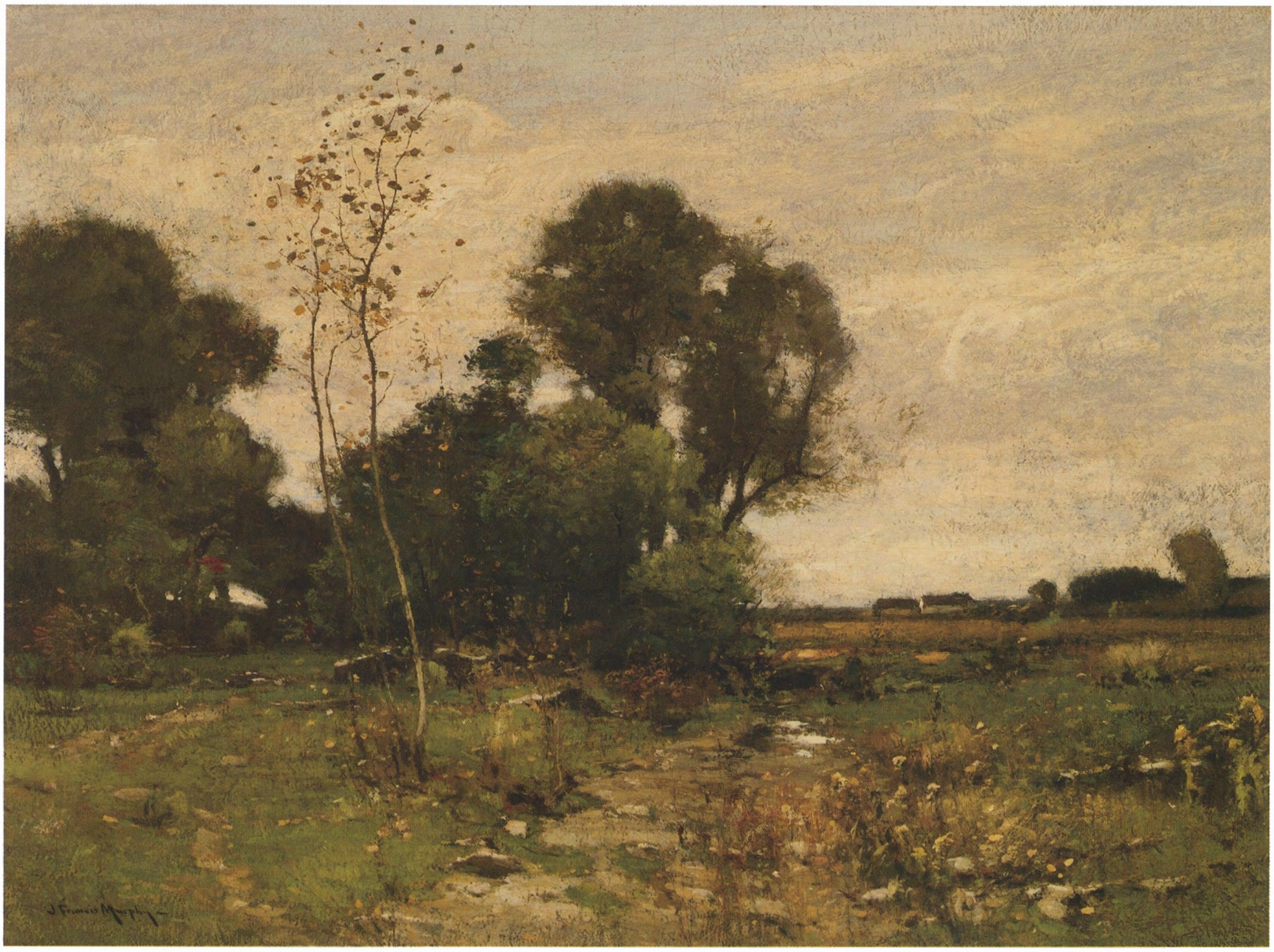


Fig. 2. J. Francis Murphy, *Summertime*, 1885. Oil on panel, 14 x 19 in. Private collection.

unity, while emphasizing the underlying armature of the landscape at dusk. The geometry of farmers' fields, interspersed with wooded copses and buildings, undulating hills, and cloud-streaked sky, weaves a pattern of interlocking tonal variations that projects a feeling of tranquil repose. A key component in producing such coruscating qualities of broken tone—something much admired in the heyday of Tonalism—was the use of glazes, here described in 1914 by one of their greatest Tonalist exponents, Henry Ward Ranger:

> A glaze is simply colour dissolved or suspended in a medium which, when washed over a light surface, is transparent, allowing the light to go through and be reflected back. It is merely a varnish or oil wash instead of a water-colour wash. The basic principle of its charm is analogous to that of stained glass. Take a bit of glass of any colour, hold it in your hand and look at it away from the light! it is one thing now; but when you look through it at the light it is immediately much richer and fuller in tone; it is now another and more beautiful thing. I feel, now, that for an artist to paint without the use of glazes is like a man trying to fight with one hand tied behind his back. No matter how well he does, he could do better with the use of the other arm.[6]

This dexterous use of colored glazes often produced a jewellike luminescence, giving the painted surfaces a vibrant atmospheric quality, both suggestive and mysterious. Ranger, like Whistler and other Tonalist colleagues, looked to Titian, Rembrandt, and Velázquez as his artistic forbearers: "The superior power of tone over positive colour, and the superiority of suggestion over positive statement, were understood, and had become an artistic law. . . . Tonality to us means just one thing and but one thing. If you were to give it an arbitrary definition you might say, *harmonious modulations of colour*."[7]

J. Francis Murphy's *Summertime*, 1885 (fig. 2), is a classic early example from this master Tonalist of the use of repetition and variation of tones to produce a sense of encompassing harmony; the key elements of the landscape have been synthetically arranged to please the eye, while the predominant green tones in the meadow grass, wildflowers, and trees create a sense of bucolic repose. As a whole, the array of greens creates an ineffable sense of seasonal glory. A later work by Murphy, *Summer*, 1906 (fig. 3), shows how a similar array of greens and ochers can be applied in expressive swaths of energized pigment and honeyed glazes to create a similar if more modernistic poetic effect; in this case the sheer variety and intensity of these soft-edged

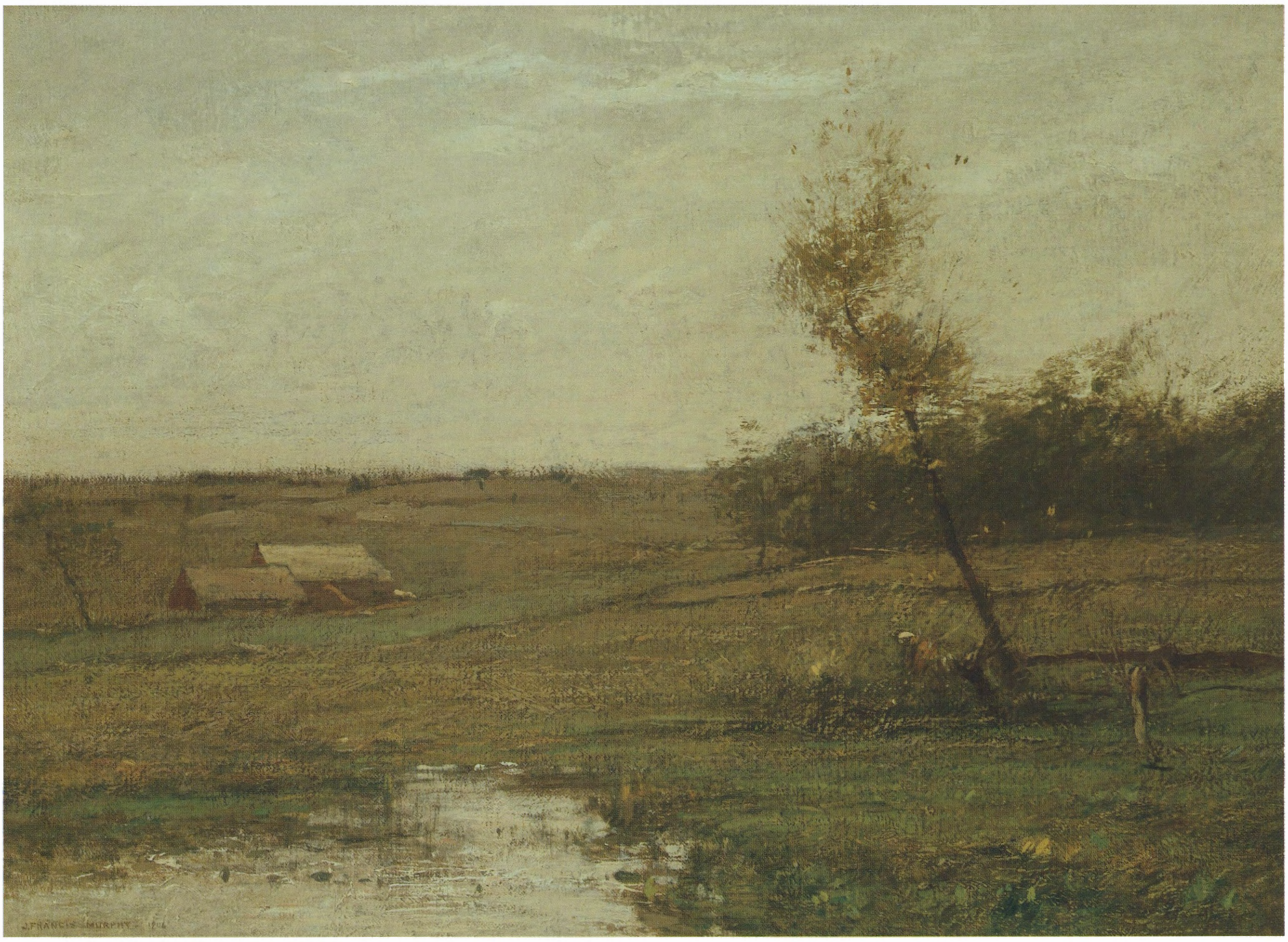


Fig. 3. J. Francis Murphy, *Summer*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

color tones carry the emotional weight of the painting. Tonalist artist Elliott Daingerfield, writing in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1917, touched on these qualities in Murphy's work:

> In other years there are some wonderful green studies—poems, if you will—done in magical tones of grey and green, and long ago I can remember sunset things where the horizon edge burned in living fire and the world was shrouded in the mystery of nightfall. And he has felt the weather and the season's range—particularly he has loved and painted the spring and the autumn. The warm haze of autumn and Indian summer is often evident in his work and greatly loved for the mystery of half-revealed forms. . . . His [later] pictures are broader, less worked out in detail, but big and calm, the envelope of atmosphere beautifully adjusted.[8]

Similarly, Leonard Ochtman's *Greenwich*, 1896 (fig. 4), is a lush study in the application of various green tonalities, particularly in how those greens are applied in brush marks of different intensity and direction, creating delicate grids of spring hues broken only by the sweep of dappled road, stone walls, and a few geometric forms of salmon pinks in the buildings. A later work, *Fall Meadow*, c. 1910 (fig. 5), similarly takes delight in the vigorous patterning of horizontal and vertical brushstrokes of a restricted range of umber browns and russet tones, with the gray foreground tree anchoring the eye and relieving the surrounding hues of a surfeit of monotonous color; such a predominance of rich autumnal tones—the lightest belonging to the panel support, which bleeds through throughout—gives the painting its essential emotional impact. William Anderson Coffin's *Sunset, Somerset County, Pennsylvania*, 1924 (fig. 6), achieves a comparable effect with great freedom and panache, the lush layering of olive and pea greens melding in the eye and imparting a visceral intensity that belies the small scale of the work. While a larger-scale and earlier rendering of a traditional landscape by the same artist, *River Landscape*, c. 1905 (fig. 7), is a tour de force in the deployment of various subtle pastel and chalky greens to create both a bucolic setting and a feast of interlocking patterns in the foreground tree line and the distant fields covering the low hills beyond the river. The period frame for *River Landscape* (fig. 8) offers an insight into the all-encompassing nature of the Tonalist aesthetic in its heyday; here a gold-leaf frame has been distressed with a coating of gray clay to approximate the pastel tones in the painting, so matching frame and canvas in one seamless expression.

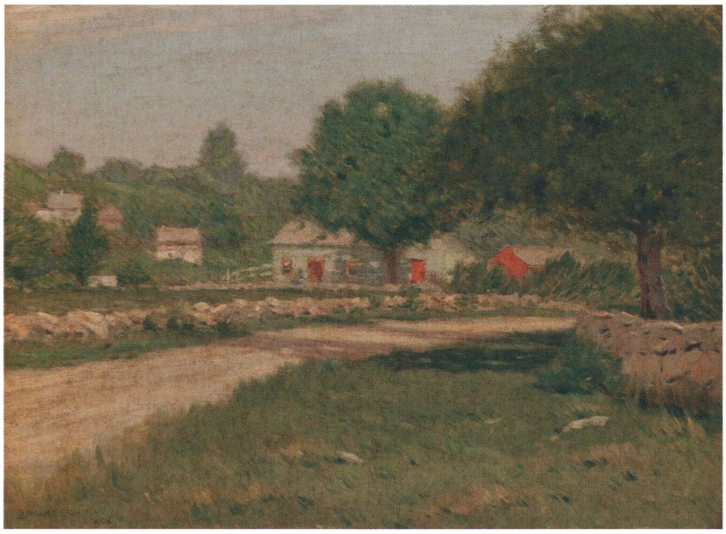


Fig. 4. Leonard Ochtman, *Greenwich*, 1896. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

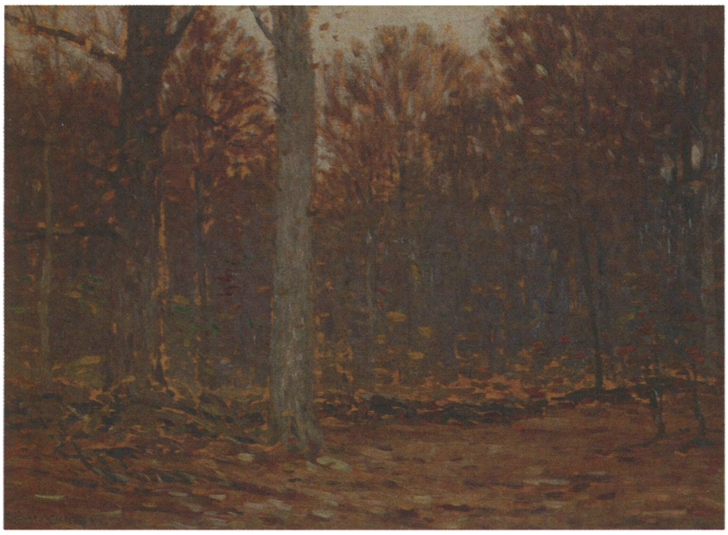


Fig. 5. Leonard Ochtman, *Fall Meadow*, c. 1910. Oil on panel, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

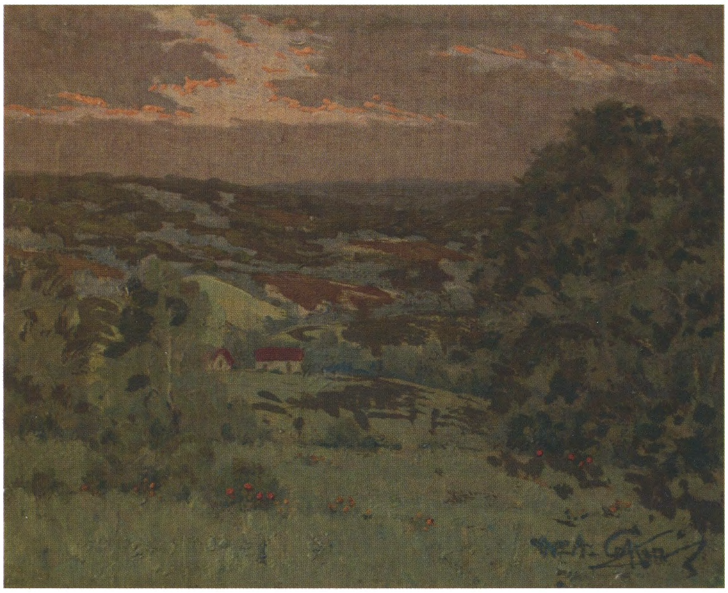


Fig. 6. William Anderson Coffin, *Sunset, Somerset County, Pennsylvania*, 1924. Oil on panel, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

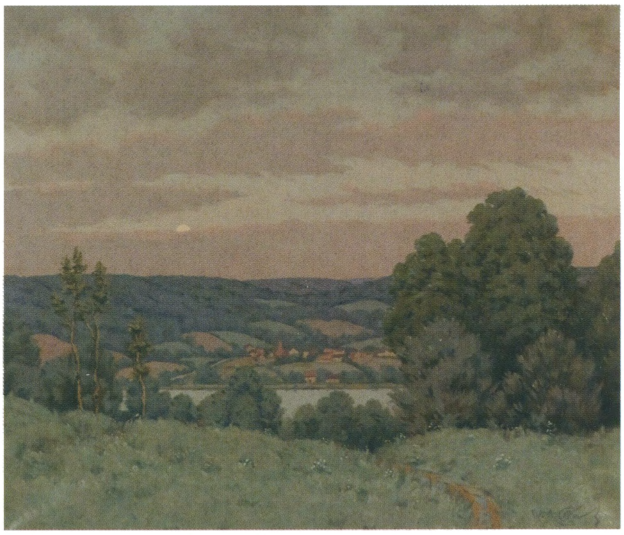


Fig. 7. William Anderson Coffin, *River Landscape*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 24 x 29 in. Private collection.

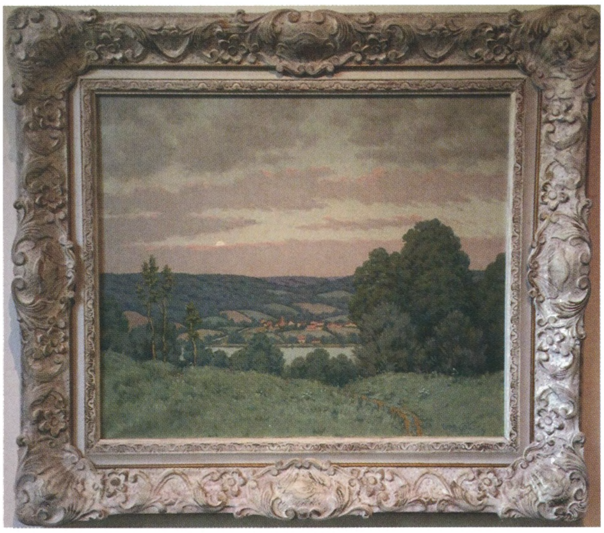


Fig. 8. William Anderson Coffin, *River Landscape* (with frame), c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 24 x 29 in. Private collection.

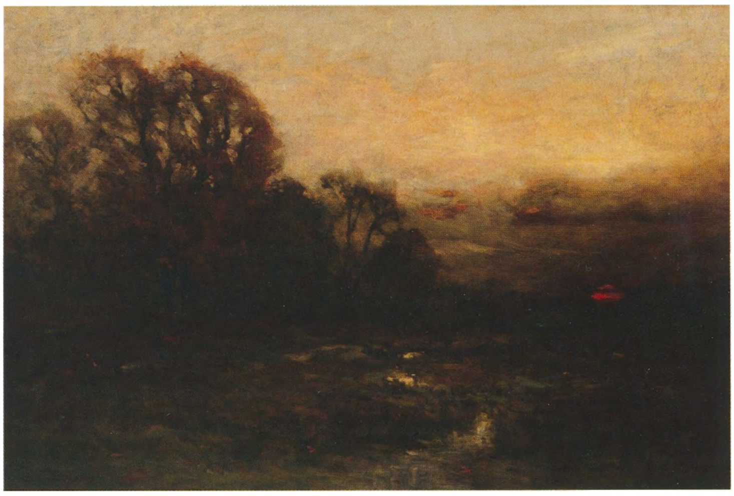


Fig. 9. Charles Melville Dewey, *Long Island Sunset*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Private collection.

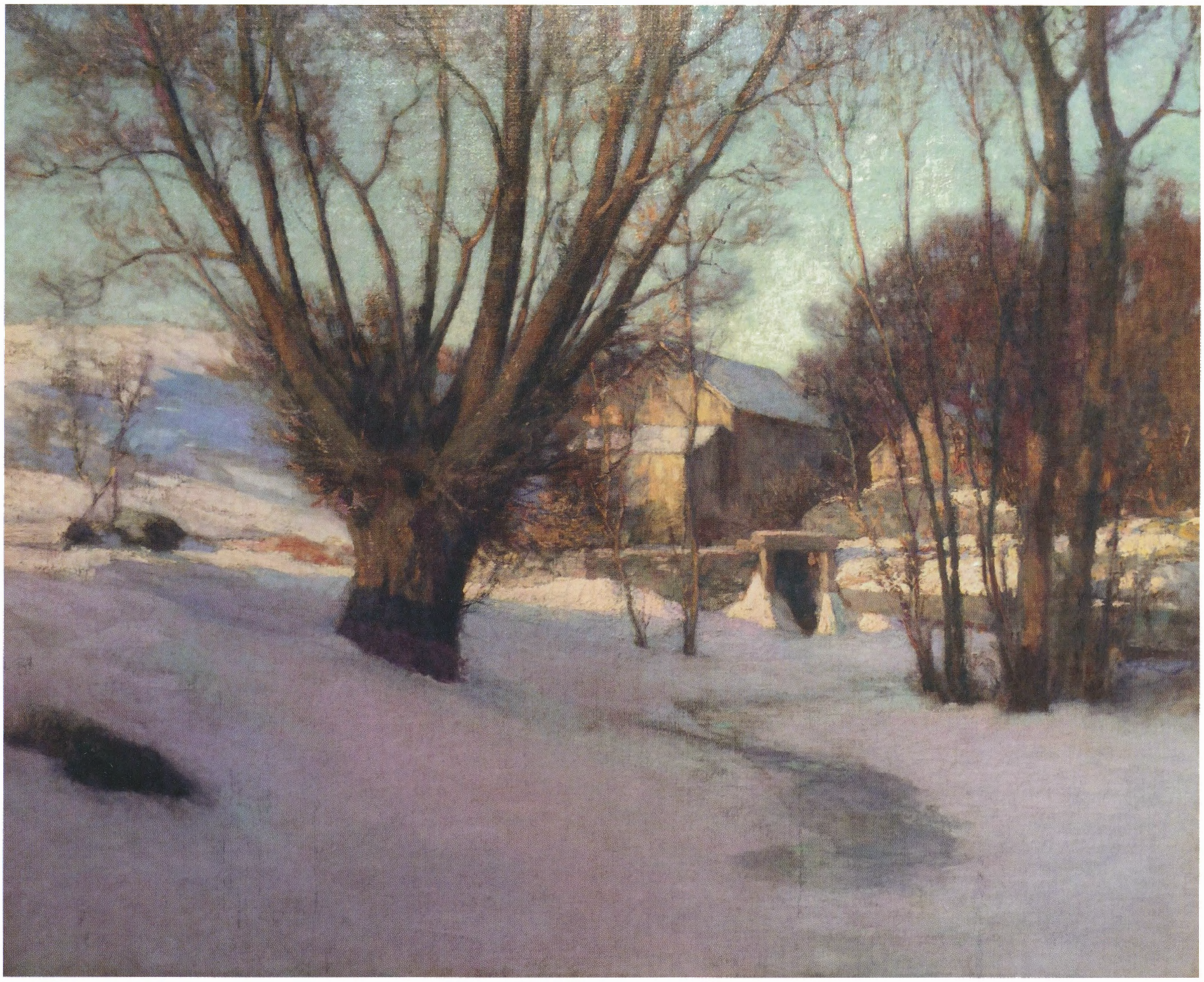


Fig. 10. Walter Nettleton, *Wind-Swept Snow*, 1901. Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 in. Private collection.

Charles Melville Dewey's *Long Island Sunset*, c. 1910 (fig. 9), exemplifies the artist's use of lush earth tones and expressive paint handling to entrance the gazer with day's fading glory. A period review by Charles de Kay in the *New York Times* of an exhibition of paintings by William Sartain (see *Old Meadow* and *Nonquit*, figs. 59 and 77), illustrates how critics of the day were conversant with the emotional quality of earthy Tonalist colors: "[Sartain's] way of looking at the landscape is austere. He's a very Quaker in tones and loves the broad smooth brownes, the grays, the drab-colored sketches of moorlands, the pale-yellowish-brown sweeps of the sand dunes by the sea . . . a general harmoniousness as to tone."[9] Perhaps one of the greatest Tonalist interpreters of winter, Walter Nettleton, in his prizewinning and widely exhibited *Wind-Swept Snow*, 1901 (fig. 10),[10] displays his exquisite feel for closely matched tones in his kaleidoscopic deployment of white tones to capture the nature of reflected light in winter. White is everywhere and nowhere: hues and shades of pink, icy blue, transparent gray, and lucent turquoise and lavender jostle and merge with near hallucinogenic vibrancy—an effect breathtaking to behold. Novelist and critic Willa Cather, who as a journalist was well acquainted with the art and artists of the Tonalist movement, in a 1900 review of the work of Tonalist Dwight Tryon, noted a similar rendering of coloristic effects employed by that artist: "This is a windy May, of blues and violets and light greens and yellows, with the cleanest of color and treated with great elasticity and delightful enthusiasm and freshness."[11] In her fiction, as demonstrated here in *One of Ours*, Cather used many tonal effects to create states of feeling by repeated descriptions of a dominant color or hue, a modernist strategy (of "repetition" and "variation," as advocated by Poe; see below) that wonderfully impresses a certain mood on the mind of her readers: "The light about him, the very air, was green. The trunks of the trees were overgrown with a soft green moss, like mould. He was wondering whether this forest was not always a damp, gloomy place, when suddenly the sun broke through and shattered the whole wood with gold. He had never seen anything like the quivering emerald of the moss, the silky green of the

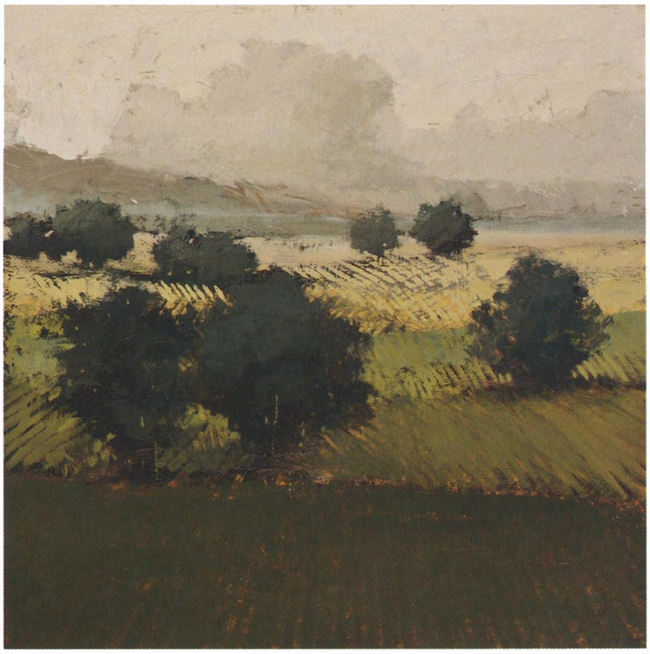


Fig. 11. Paul Balmer, *Green Hills*, 2013. Oil on canvas, 40 x 40 in. Private collection.

dripping beech-tops."[12] In a contemporary vein, Paul Balmer's *Green Hills*, 2013 (fig. 11), achieves much the same spell with a limited range of green tones and complementary yellows and off-whites, while the square dimensions of his canvas further augment the graphic design of the whole, pressing forward onto the front plane of the canvas his spirited brushwork and dramatic hatched patterns, which in turn enhance the feeling of joy to be experienced in this bravura rendering of landscape under a cloud-billowing sky.

2. Aesthetic and Expressive Tonalism

As has been demonstrated in the first edition of *A History of American Tonalism*, the Tonalist movement evolved from *Aesthetic Tonalism*, an early style (c. 1880) of small-scale landscapes characterized by formal design and paint handling that is refined and nuanced, quiet and intimate in visual effect, to a later style, *Expressive Tonalism* (c. 1900), in which the use of expressive brushstrokes on larger and larger canvases become commonplace—while patterning was somewhat downplayed—as modernist tendencies to display freewheeling dynamic paint handling took root in America, if not throughout the international art world. Aesthetic Tonalism, with its emphasis on balanced design, subtle patterning, and a kind of otherworldly equipoise, came directly out of the Aesthetic movement and artistic philosophy of art for art's sake promoted by its most storied exponent, James McNeill Whistler (see discussion starting on p. 125), whose small-scale, exquisitely executed, nonnarrative etchings, pastels, and oils embodied this artistic credo. By 1880, Whistler was all the rage in American progressive art circles. Whistler's followers embraced Asian art, especially Japanese woodblock prints, with their emphasis on flat formal design, repeating decorative patterns, and low-toned abstraction of organic shapes. William Anderson Coffin's *Sunset Tones*, c. 1890 (fig. 12), is a classic example of this intimate, low-toned, and exquisite landscape mode of the 1880s and '90s; the subdued light of dusk exaggerates the bare-bones forms of the landscape, an artificial pattern that Coffin has deliberately arranged to allow

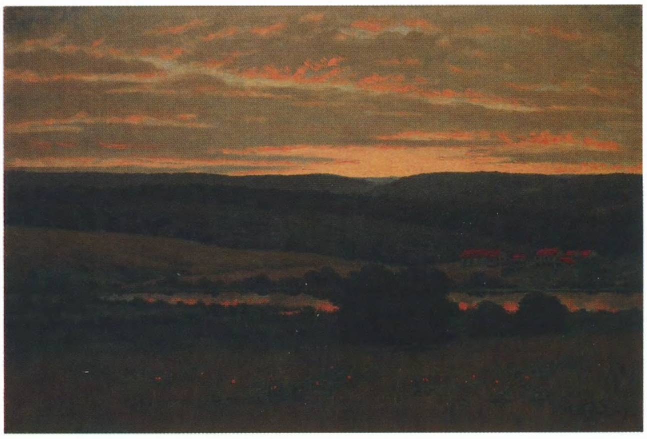


Fig. 12. William Anderson Coffin, *Sunset Tones*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

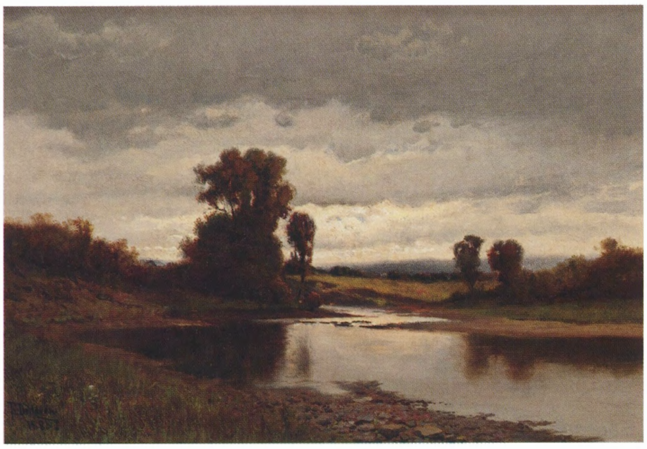


Fig. 13. Franklin De Haven, *Lakeside*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

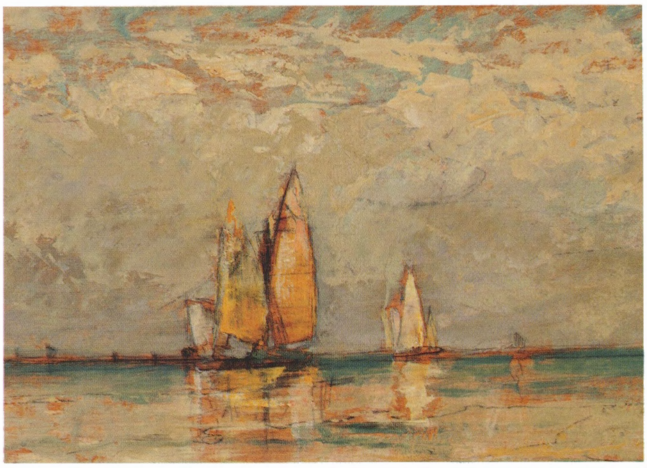


Fig. 14. William Gedney Bunce, *Venice, Sail Reflections*, 1885. Oil on panel, 8 x 11 in. Private collection.

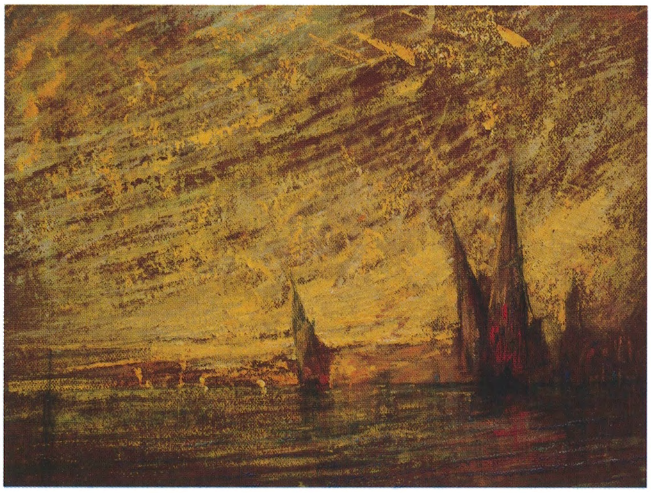


Fig. 15. William Gedney Bunce, *Venezia*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 20 x 26 in. Private collection.

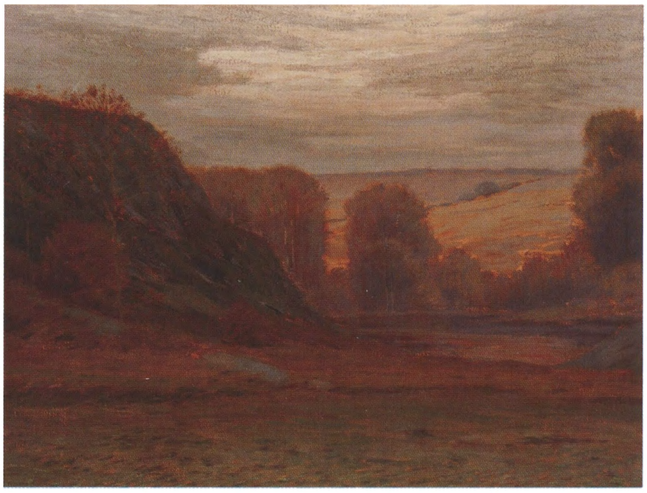


Fig. 17. Leonard Ochtman, *Spirit of Fall*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 29 x 36 in. Private collection.

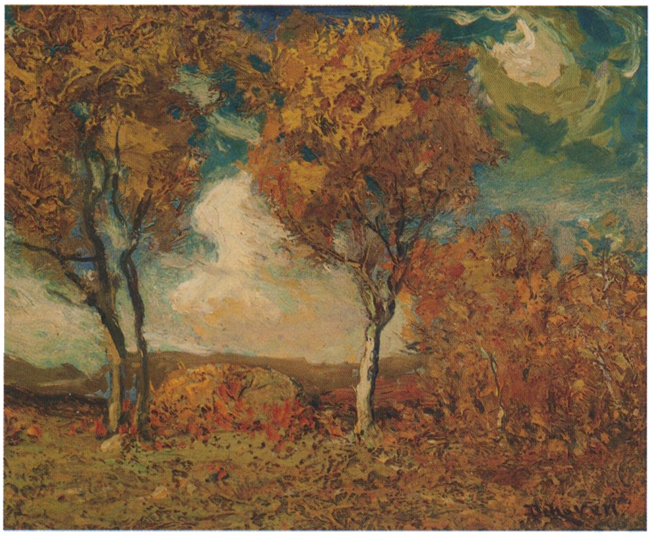


Fig. 16. Franklin De Haven, *Orange Trees*, c. 1910. Oil on panel, 7 x 9 in. Private collection.

the eye to wander in zigzags from the foreground throughout the landscape and even into the cloud-streaked sky, where the diagonal movements are echoed ad infinitum. Balance, mystery, and sensuous form make the work an eye-catching window into some supersensible world, translating the far-reaching into the intimate. *Lakeside*, 1885 (fig. 13), by Franklin De Haven, displays a similarly mapped-out, synthetic design of lazy diagonals and lush natural forms under clouds, sharply delineated in the rocky shore of the foreground and receding to more hazy trees in the background—all to the end of projecting the intimacy invoked by a place of repose and reflection. An early oil by William Gedney Bunce, *Venice, Sail Reflections*, 1885 (fig. 14), demonstrates how Aesthetic Tonalism could be translated as well to marine subjects, here deftly executed with the slashing strokes of the palette knife but retaining all the quietude and formal design of the style. A later work by the same artist from around 1900, *Venezia* (fig. 15), shows how the latent expressionism of Bunce's style developed into a full-blown work of Expressive Tonalism, in which the pinwheels of slathered yellows—Bunce's favorite color—and searing oranges careen across the dun sky of the support in an uninhibited celebration of light and color. The design element of Aesthetic Tonalism remains, but the emphasis is now on the energy and the reflected glory of the sunset, if not the artist's sheer joy in creation.

A similar transition from early- to late-style Tonalism—that is, from Aesthetic Tonalism to Expressive Tonalism—can be illustrated in the work of scores of the best artists of the period from 1880 to 1920, none more brilliantly than that of J. Francis Murphy, in his *Summertime* and *Summer* (see figs. 2 and 3). Spanning a twenty-year stretch, these two examples illustrate how the artist's work evolved from a masterful example of classic Aesthetic Tonalism, in which every detail, from paint marks to landscape forms, has been orchestrated to create an aura of poetic repose and harmony, to the later landscape, where detail has been dramatically reduced and delineation of form minimized, so enabling the expressive power of the supersaturated green tones to create a kind of muted energy field that seems to radiate heat, if not the dazzle and cicada-buzz of high summer. Franklin De Haven's *Orange Trees*, c. 1910 (fig. 16), demonstrates this painter's later preoccupation with expressive paint handling and the channeling of nature's energies in the gestural mark of the artist's hand. Leonard Ochtman's *Greenwich* and *Fall Meadow* (see figs. 4 and 5), as well as a much larger canvas, *Spirit of Fall*, c. 1910 (fig. 17), illustrate the evolution among master Tonalists from their early emphasis on a perfectly composed conceptual art to a later more energized version embracing personal expression on larger supports, and ultimately, a portrayal of the carrying power of nature's metamorphic energy as embodied in the paint mark itself. *Spirit of Fall*, in particular, marvelously displays the dynamic melding of Aesthetic and Expressive Tonalism, in a work composed with elegant and balanced precision yet painted with broad and

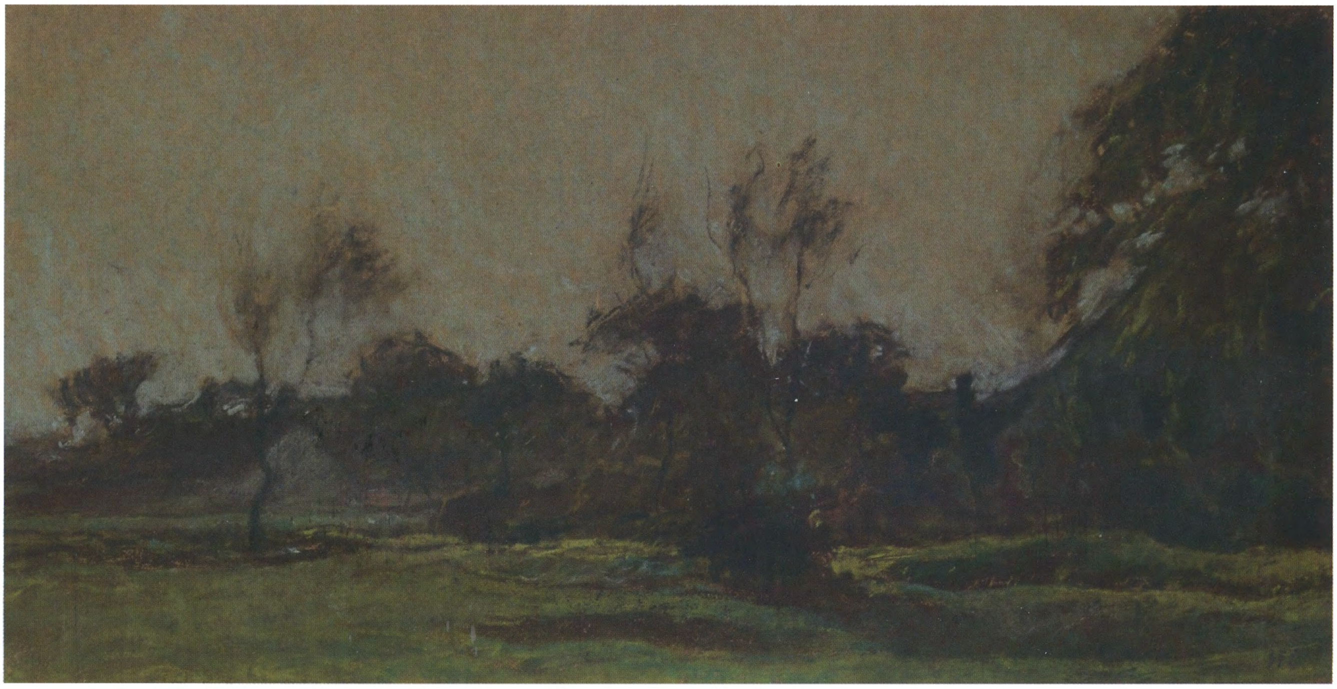


Fig. 18. J. Frank Currier, *Summer Green*, 1890. Pastel and charcoal, 5 x 10 in. Private collection.

exuberant brushstrokes as lush and energetic as they are controlled. Perhaps no single Tonalist artist did more to spearhead the movement toward a more expressive style than J. Frank Currier, whose slashing free-spirited work in pastel, watercolor, and oil transfixed many of the best artists of his generation, including Winslow Homer (see pp. 90–92). Currier's pastel *Summer Green*, 1890 (fig. 18), displays a vibrant power mixed with lyrical flowing passages of sumptuous color that characterized the artist's embodiment of Frans Hals's old-master flashiness, an approach that seems to mirror the underlying metamorphic forces in nature—even to the degree that the various dwellings are caught up in the vortex of natural forms as one and the same. In Currier's style, aspects of both Aesthetic and Expressive Tonalism were seamlessly integrated by the early 1880s, influencing his many students and colleagues such as William Merritt Chase and Frank Duveneck.

3. Stress on symbolic form

The Tonalists' use of a narrow range of tones and a synthetic arrangement of landscape elements adds to the immediacy of the composition, strengthening the graphic reading of organic, geologic, and man-made features and thus the symbolic resonance of natural forms, whether in stark silhouette or set against a neutral background. In Europe, Whistler almost single-handedly developed the symbolic mode in his mysterious nocturnes, painted along the Thames, setting the example for Monet's Thames paintings, Degas's landscapes of the 1890s, and the works of a host of later Symbolist painters that would come to include modernists like Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. As discussed on pages 404–9 (and see "The Poetry of Tonalism," further below in this Introduction), Whistler and his American expatriate colleague Alexander Harrison provided both the model for the artist character Elstir and inspiration for many of the lushest and most poignant descriptive passages on landscapes in Marcel Proust's sprawling masterpiece *Remembrance of Things Past*. What is most striking about Proust's descriptive writing is how often natural and man-made objects (steeples, trees, flowers, sculptures, seas, rivers, and clouds) strike the first-person narrator with distinctly symbolic overtones, and how various patterns and lighting effects stir forth ideas and memories, if not personages, from

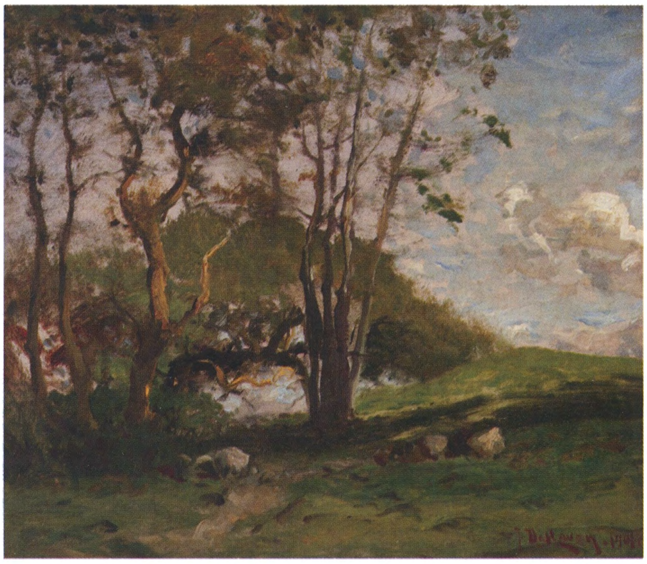


Fig. 19. Franklin De Haven, *Verdant Hills*, 1901. Oil on panel, 12 x 14 in. Private collection.

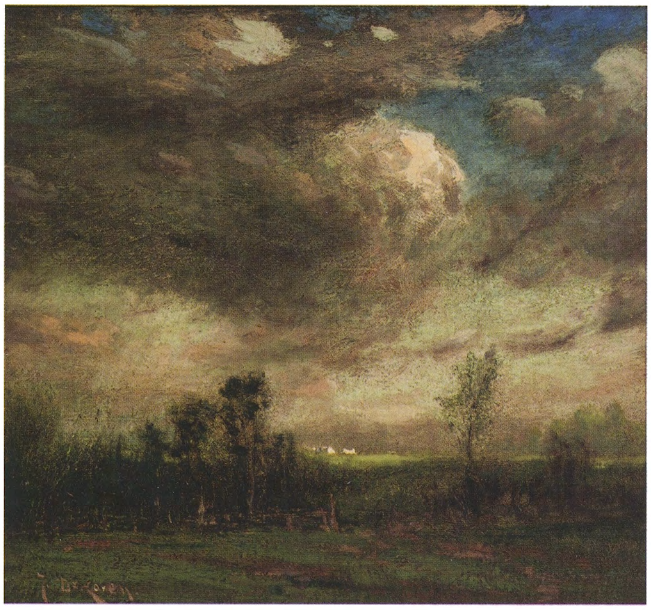


Fig. 20. Franklin De Haven, *Storm Clouds*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 11 x 12 in. Private collection.

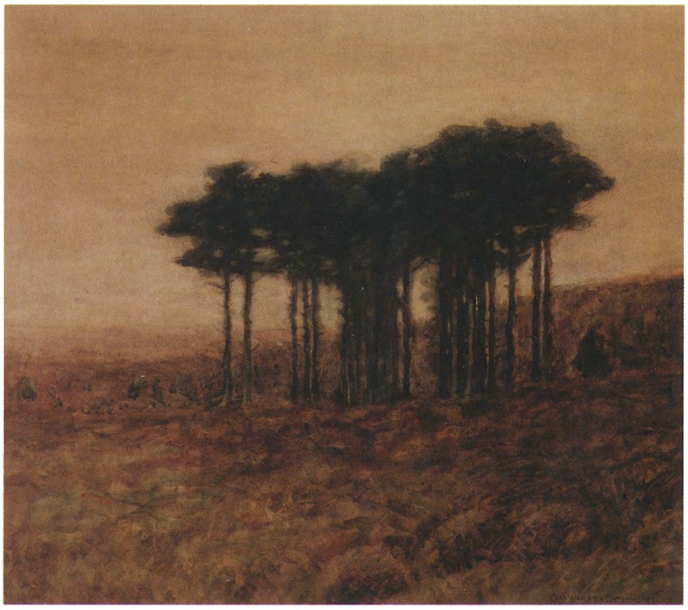


Fig. 21. Charles Warren Eaton, *Gloaming Pines*, c. 1910. Watercolor, 14 x 16 in. Private collection.

his febrile mind. Perhaps the most famous passage (see p. 407) occurs when the narrator, traveling in a carriage and pair, sights three trees near the Normandy town he calls Balbec (modeled on Cabourg) and struggles desperately to understand why this particular configuration—the three trees forming "a pattern which I was not seeing for the first time"—along a country road should have such a powerful hold over his imagination. Struggling to decipher their impact, he wonders whether the trees don't remind him of some moment from his childhood in Combray, a memory so vivid that the present moment seems to dissolve into make-believe. Perhaps the three trees are a survival from the "forgotten book of my earliest childhood?" "Or were they merely an image freshly extracted from a dream of the night before, but already so worn, so faded that it seemed to me to come from somewhere far more distant?" Or was this sighting simply inviting new thoughts or hidden thoughts to arise from the depths of the mind? The narrator fails to solve his quandary, and recalls that, as the trees drift out of sight, "I was as wretched as if I had just lost a friend, had died to myself, had broken faith with the dead or repudiated a god."[13]

The author's dreamy response to these trees is a not uncommon occurrence; our reactions to scenes in the landscape, or a work of art, often touch on various associations, whether they be memories or dreams or just deep feelings that certain configurations of light and (symbolic) form produce in us. Or perhaps, as Proust had suggested earlier in his novel after a similar experience, they can be attributed to the Celtic belief that dead souls are reincarnated in some plant or animal or inanimate object and remain lost to us until the day we pass nearby the object that imprisons this lost soul, whereupon he or she calls out to us, breaking the spell upon recognition. As Proust wrote of such a vain quest of the intellect, "The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die."[14]

I believe it is not stretching the point to suggest that the Tonalist artists carefully adjusted their landscape imagery to ring changes on precisely the range of emotions Proust described when writing about features in the landscape. Nor is it unusual to find writings describing similar emotional responses generated by symbolic form in the work of Thoreau and Emerson. Emerson's writings were well known to Proust, as they were to most Tonalist artists. The sage of Concord wrote movingly that the great turning points in life are not events but moments of illumination, ideas, or a "thought which reverses our entire manner of life."[15] Today we might think of such moments as epiphanies, and Thoreau, who was much more methodical in his close observations of nature than Emerson, filled his journals with his joy and perplexity at experiencing such miracles of light and color, whether transfixed by a sunset or marveling at the patterns of fallen leaves or lichens on a tree trunk: "The earth which is spread out like a map around me is but the lining of my inmost soul exposed. . . . I wish so to live ever as to derive my satisfactions and inspirations from the commonest events, every-day phenomena, so that what my senses hourly perceive, my daily walk, the conversation of my neighbors, may inspire me, and I may dream of no heaven but that which lies about me."[16] Such radical subjectivity fills the sails of the Tonalist canon, prompting the use of symbolic form to render visible those choice moments that inspired the artists.

In the aforementioned *Orange Trees* (see fig. 16), Franklin De Haven enhanced the symbolic force of the two trees—a

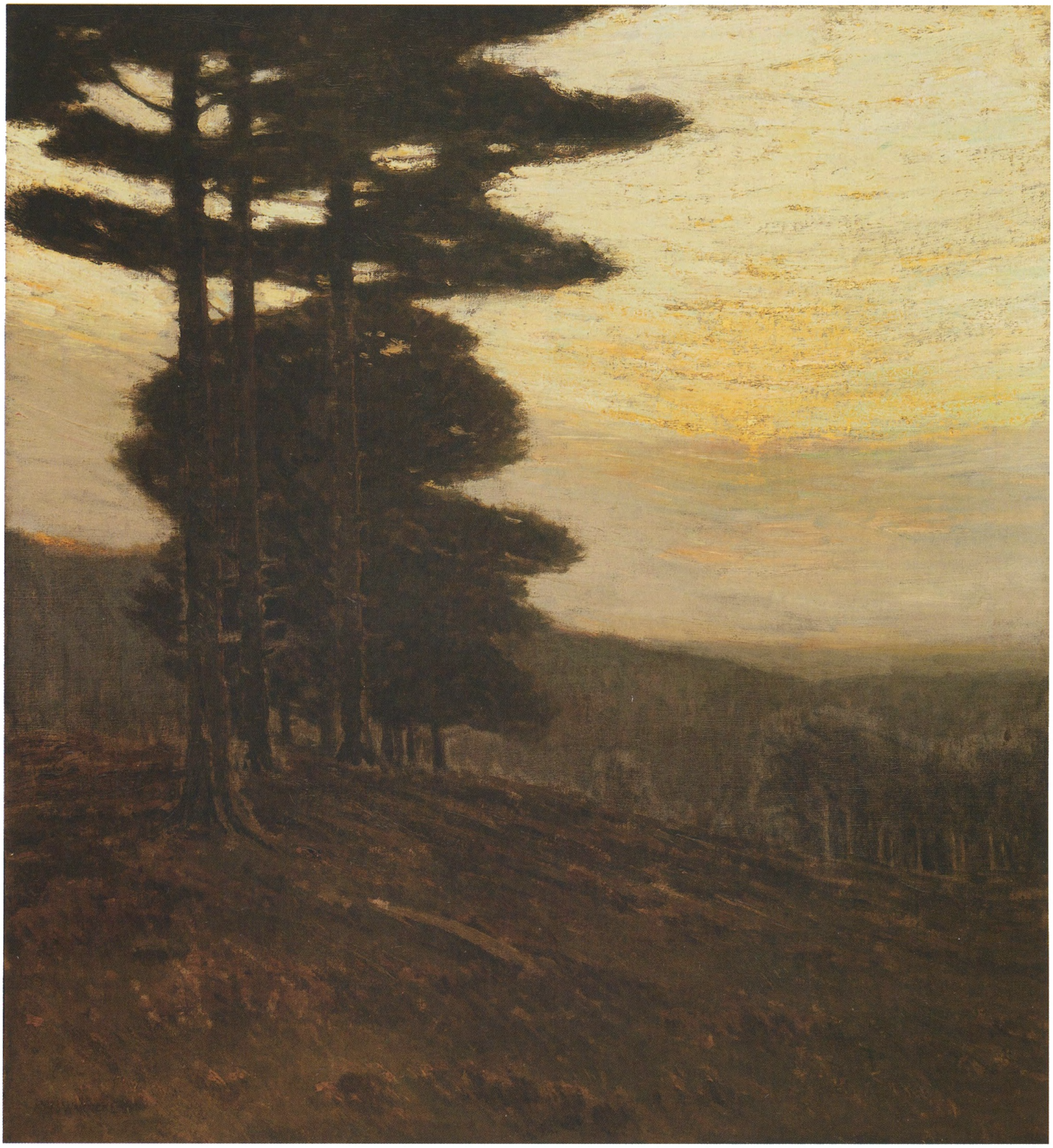


Fig. 22. Charles Warren Eaton, *Forest Edge*, c. 1904. Oil on canvas, 30 x 28 in. Private collection.

flurry of jotted paint marks—by juxtaposing them against a sky of swirling clouds. De Haven's *Verdant Hills*, 1901 (fig. 19), illustrates the expressive use of a limited tonal range in dramatizing his gesticulating tree trunks and the ragged shape of a mass of treetops receding into the background. Even the foreground path, rock outcroppings, and stone wall seem alive with an ingrained narrative imparted to the imagination by virtue of their sketchy but dramatic forms, while the glint of sunset on the upper branches of the foreground trees adds yet another moment of enchantment to the scene. The artist's *Storm Clouds*, c. 1905 (fig. 20), achieves a comparable power by focusing the composition on billowing cloud formations that dwarf the wind-bent trees in the foreground. Charles Warren Eaton registers a similar if more subdued effect in his brooding watercolor *Gloaming Pines*, c. 1910 (fig. 21), in which the extremely limited range of earth tones enforces a stark and compelling vision of a copse of white pines in near silhouette, their shapes registering with an immediacy and profundity in the mind's eye. An analogous effect is further heightened in Eaton's *Forest Edge*, c. 1904 (fig. 22), where the soft-edged pine boughs, verging on near-total two-dimensional symbolic abstraction, imprint themselves upon the sunset, which in

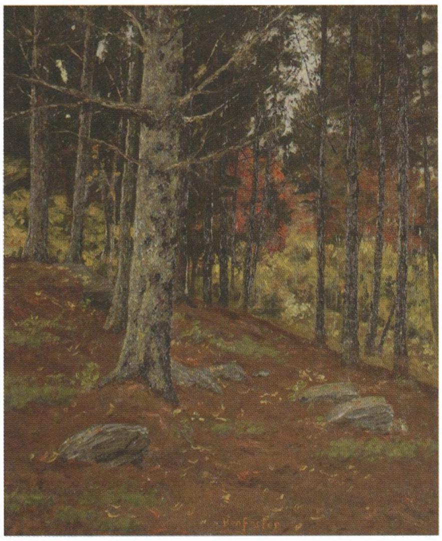


Fig. 23. Ben Foster, *Hillside Trees*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 22 x 18 in. Private collection.

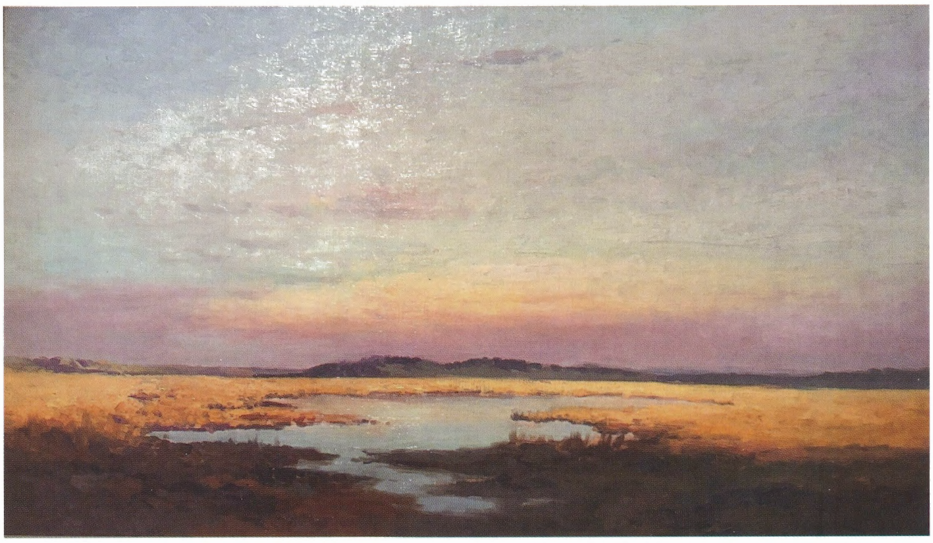


Fig. 24. Franklin De Haven, *Sunset on Long Island*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 19 x 34 in. Private collection.

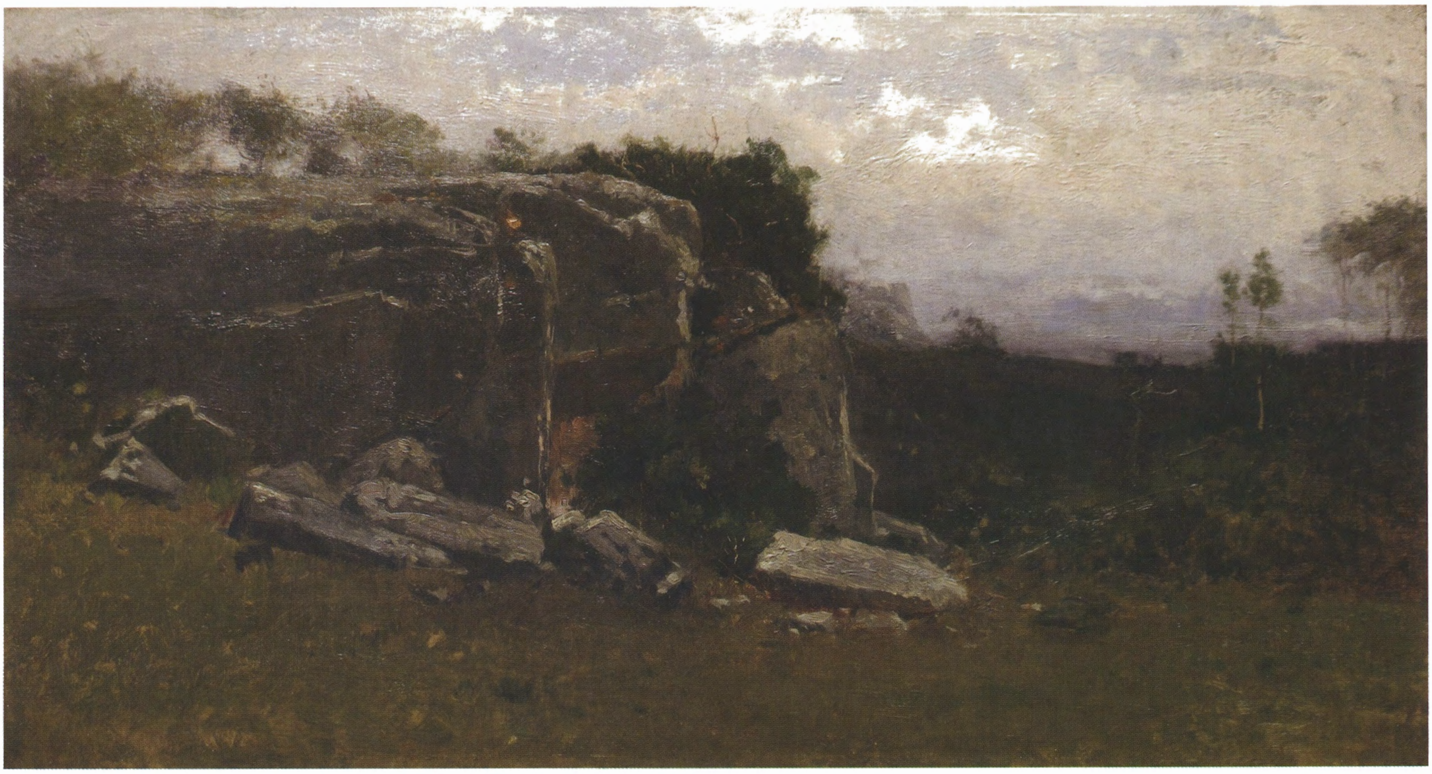


Fig. 25. Robert Swain Gifford, *Barney's Joy Cliff*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 16 x 30 in. Private collection.

turn—in horizontal bands of yellow-gold hues—has been transmuted into a formal element of the interlocked composition. In 1904, this was still a cutting-edge strategy, fully absorbing Japanese models of woodblock prints and so fueling the Arts and Crafts movement, with its use of similar graphic imagery for decorative effects.

Ben Foster's *Hillside Trees*, c. 1910 (fig. 23), provides yet another variation on a medley of tree trunks as abstracting elements, here in cropped verticals, fore- and middle ground, on a sharp incline, creating an array of colored apertures into the more brightly lit and colorful areas behind. *Long Island Sunset* by Charles Melville Dewey (see fig. 9) depicts the kind of lush, natural symbolic forms viewed at dusk that were most dear to the Tonalist imagination, a trope partially enumerated in a *New York Times* review of Dewey's work in 1916: "The large silhouette of the tree masses, the breadth of the nobly designed sky, the solidity of the earth, are elements of that sense of security in the working of eternal laws throughout the universe which the sight of wide horizons at still moments inspires."[17] An even wider, more encompassing horizon is featured in Franklin De Haven's *Sunset on Long Island*, c. 1900 (fig. 24), where the depiction of both a low-lying landscape and a dazzling sky—emphasized by the elongated horizontal format of the image—adds to the immediacy of the overall effect for the viewer; the sensuous shape of the foreground body of water, the wavelike undulations of the horizon line, and the vaporous lineaments of the clouds not only ring true to the eye but engender a sense of infinite sublimity. Robert Swain Gifford's *Barney's Joy Cliff*, c. 1910 (fig. 25), demonstrates how a natural formation, here a huge granite outcropping in one of the artist's favorite haunts in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, provides a subject that is both intimate in terms of specific associations with a person and place and universal in its portrayal of a geologic feature that is at once a stalwart magnificence in the landscape and an evocation of time's inexorable weathering—note the litter of broken-off rock sections in the grass—of even nature's most adamantine presences.

In similar manner, the Tonalists were able to convincingly portray their favored themes by the strategic arrangement of natural symbols, going beyond the standard repertoire—trees and tree trunks, boulders, hill shapes, horizon lines, stream banks, sun and moon orbs, and a plethora of cloud formations—to include the iconology of abandoned farmlands in the Northeast, especially overgrown pastures, derelict paths and roads, crumbled fences of stone and wood, along with the occasional dilapidated barn or roofline, where a chimney topped with a writhing rope of wood smoke disappears into a fading sky. Franklin De Haven's *Ruined Farm*, 1886 (fig. 26), perfectly captures this sense of a bygone agricultural world, which would have been avidly appreciated by the Civil War generation that remarked upon—and even mourned—the many abandoned farms that littered the Northeast in these postbellum decades, old farms that would in turn be taken up by city-dwellers as country retreats.

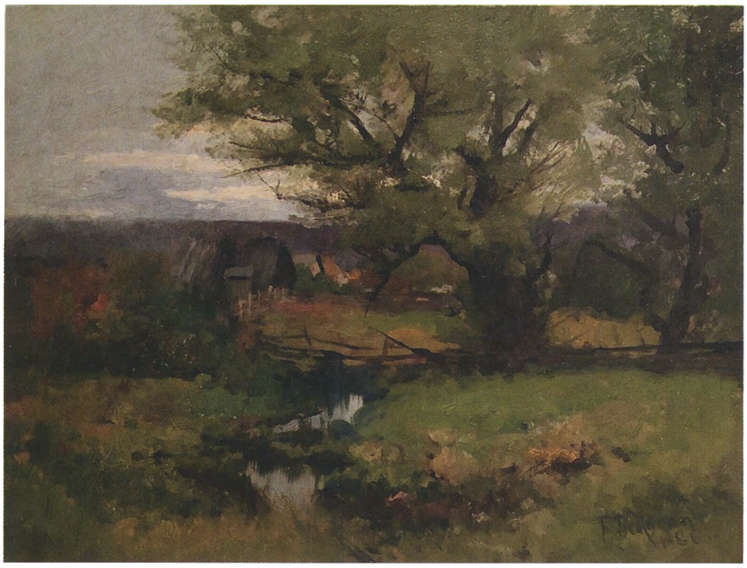


Fig. 26. Franklin De Haven, *Ruined Farm*, 1886. Oil on panel, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

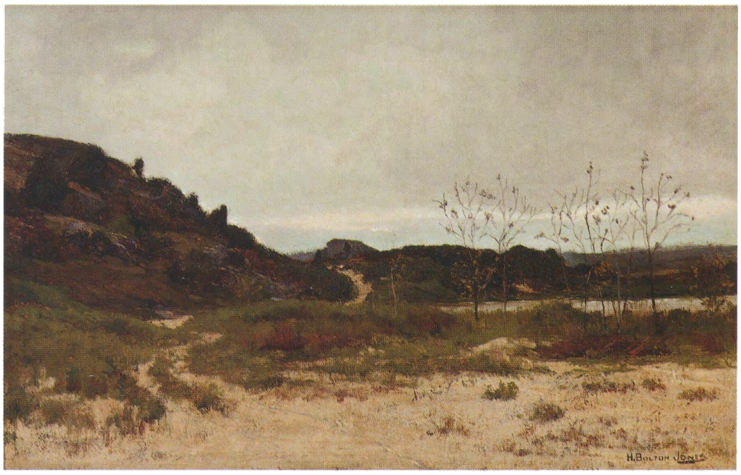


Fig. 27. Hugh Bolton Jones, *Coastal Landscape*, c. 1879. Oil on canvas, 14 x 22 in. Private collection.

4. Depiction of atmosphere (the unseen air)

The Tonalists' application of a predominant tonality along with color-saturated glazes had the collateral effect of creating a pronounced atmospheric quality in which the very air that infuses the landscape has a palpable density and optical resonance. Hugh Bolton Jones's *Coastal Landscape*, c. 1879 (fig. 27), painted in Brittany, with its emphasis on the atmospheric quality of early spring light, exemplifies the work of many Tonalists working in the American artist colonies in this region of France in the 1870s. Most developed a predilection for the silvery-gray atmosphere or microclimate of that still-remote coastal countryside, a habit of mind and eye the expatriates subsequently brought back to American painting grounds, where they chose places with similar meteorological conditions, often employing depictions of dawn and dusk, autumn and winter, in which the translucency of the atmospheric envelope is most pronounced. *Olive Trees*, 1909 (fig. 28), also painted in Brittany, by Alexander Harrison, illustrates the artist's mastery for creating the illusion of vibrant atmosphere in which all features of the landscape are magically transformed to project a kind of otherworldly aura, providing both pictorial unity and an ethereal charm in the gesticulating olive tree, the kind of scene that so bewitched the young Proust. Ben Foster's *Morning Glory*, c. 1910 (fig. 29), displays a haunting feel for the envelope of supersaturated air at sunrise in his favorite painting ground of West Cornwall, Connecticut; the quality of refracted light, infused with dew and mist, veils the grove of white pine and the lazy curve of the stream with a timeless quietude and spiritual appeal. It is yet another example of how lushly modulated glazes can produce a ravishing sense of encompassing atmosphere. William Anderson Coffin's *Sunset Tones* (see fig. 12) displays a masterful rendition of the sultry air of a summer sunset while wonderfully capturing the cool, saturated greens that provide the lineaments of his beloved western Pennsylvania landscape.

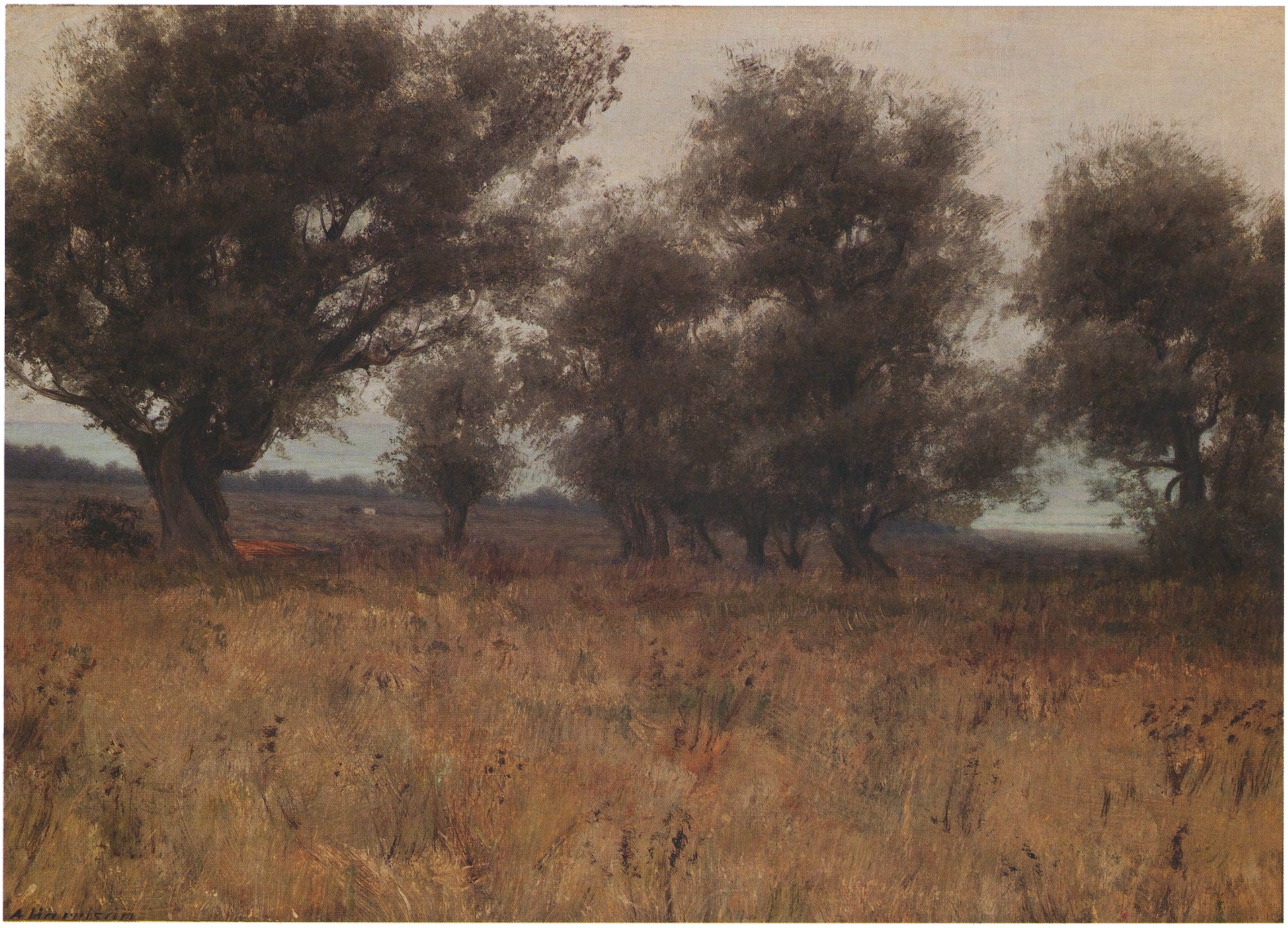


Fig. 28. Alexander Harrison, *Olive Trees*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in. Private collection.

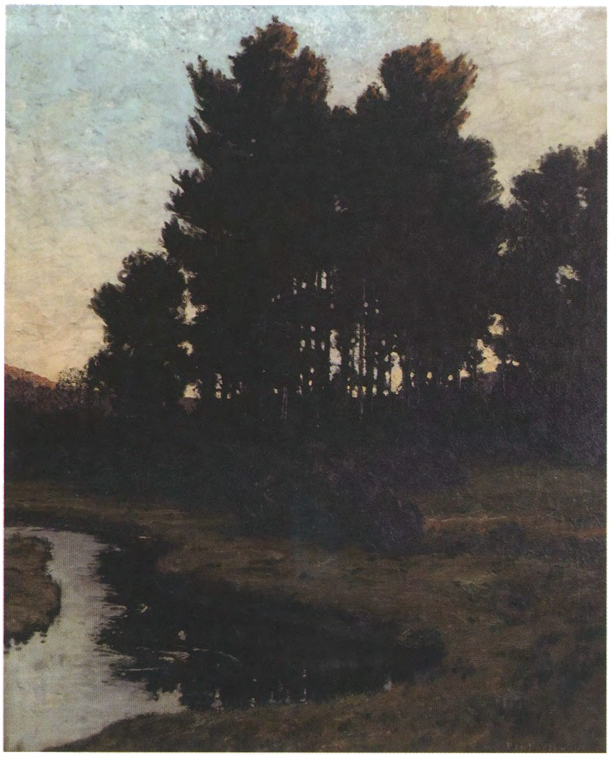


Fig. 29. Ben Foster, *Morning Glory*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 31 x 26 in. Private collection.

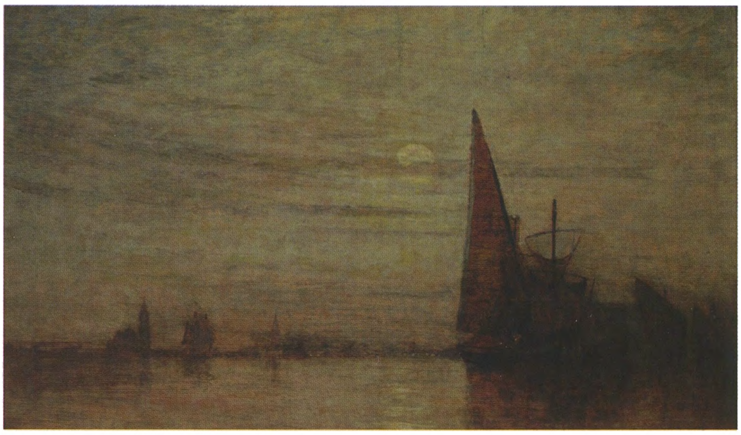


Fig. 30. William Gedney Bunce, *Nocturne Venice*, 1890. Oil on panel, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

The nocturne proved a favorite for Tonalist painters, since the subject lent itself so readily to depictions of hazy moonlight and subjects full of eerie character and moody symbolism. William Gedney Bunce's *Nocturne Venice*, 1890 (fig. 30), displays just those qualities, rendering a soulful moonlit evening on the lagoon, the brine-saturated air transformed into nacreous horizontal bands of patterned light draping a reticent moon.

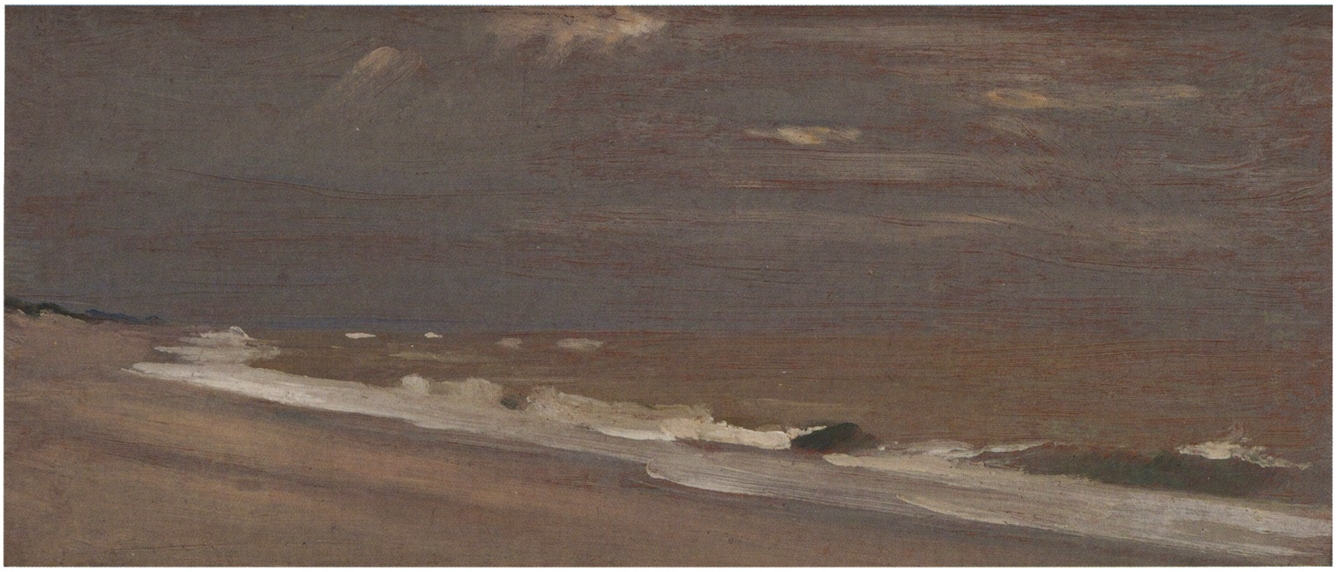


Fig. 31. Arthur Bowen Davies, *Surfside*, c. 1910. Oil on panel, 4 x 9 in. Private collection.

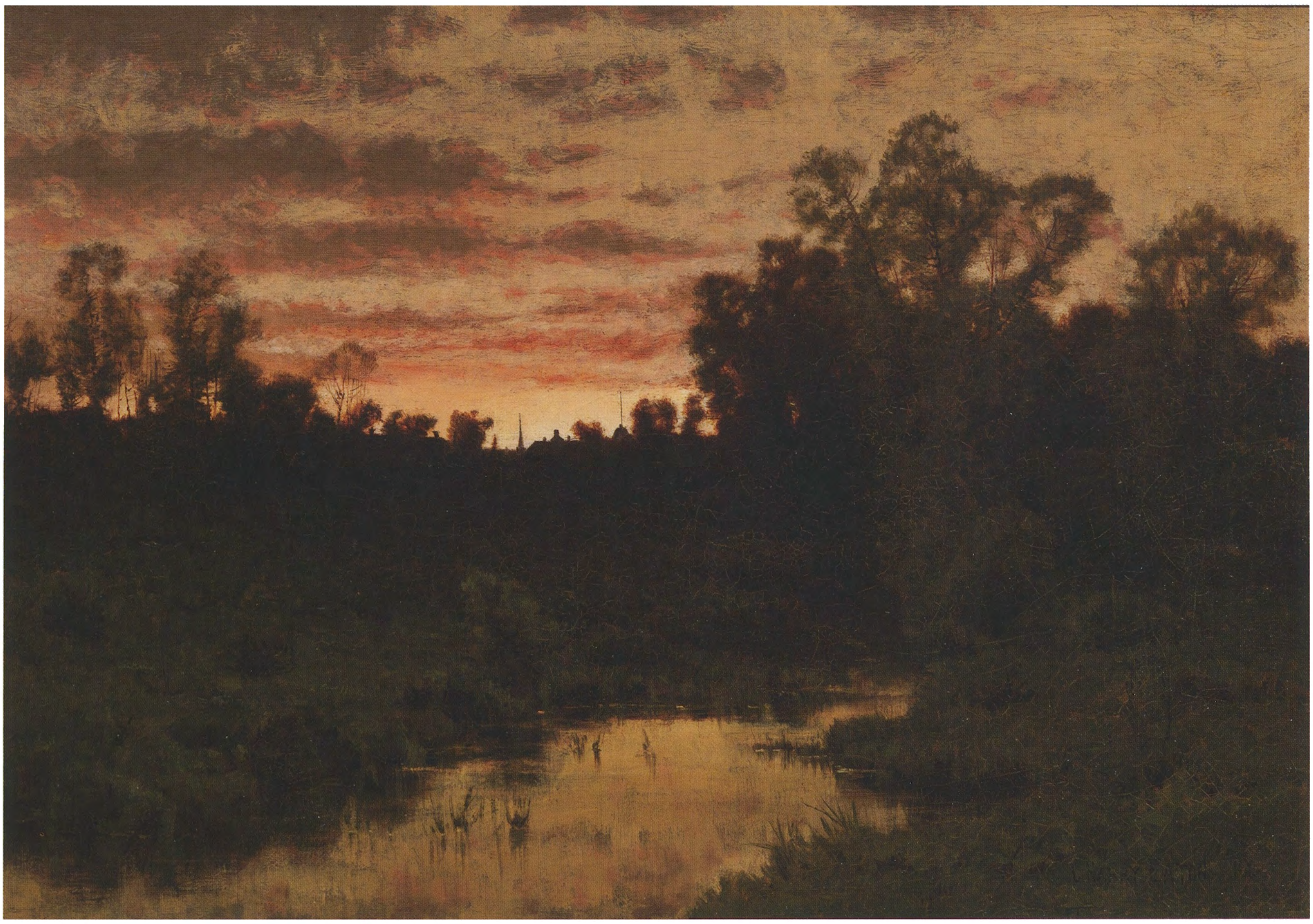


Fig. 32. Charles Harry Eaton, *Gloaming*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 13 x 19 in. Private collection.

Such a Whistlerian vision of the all-encompassing envelope of air under subdued light is also encountered in Arthur Bowen Davies's *Surfside*, c. 1910 (fig. 31), in which a minimalist vision of sand, breaking whitecaps, and overcast sky emerges from the monochromatic ground of the panel. Davies uses this same technique, as Bunce does in his nocturne (and as did Whistler in his pastels), in which the wood of the panel is allowed to bleed through the paint layer throughout the composition, both enhancing the atmospheric quality and providing a unifying tone. A near-transcendent depiction of sunset, after the sun

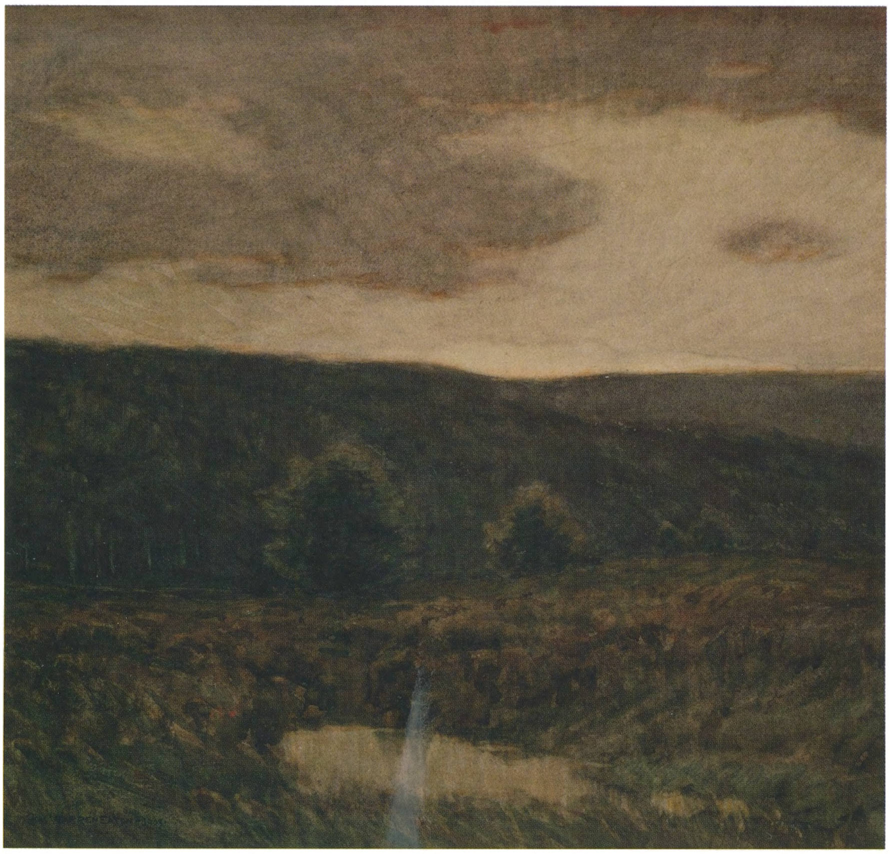


Fig. 33. Charles Warren Eaton, *Twilit Sky*, c. 1910. Watercolor, 16 x 16 in. Private collection.

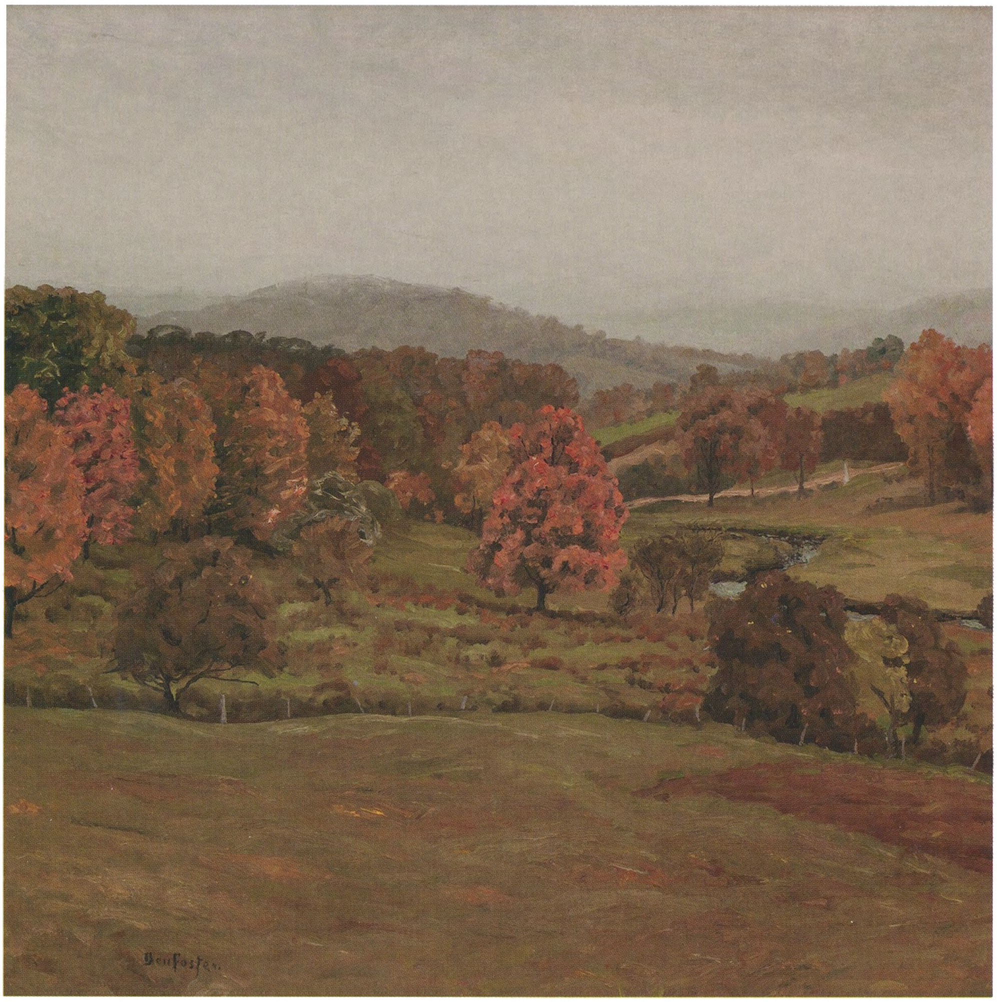


Fig. 34. Ben Foster, *Rainy Autumn Day*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in. Private collection.

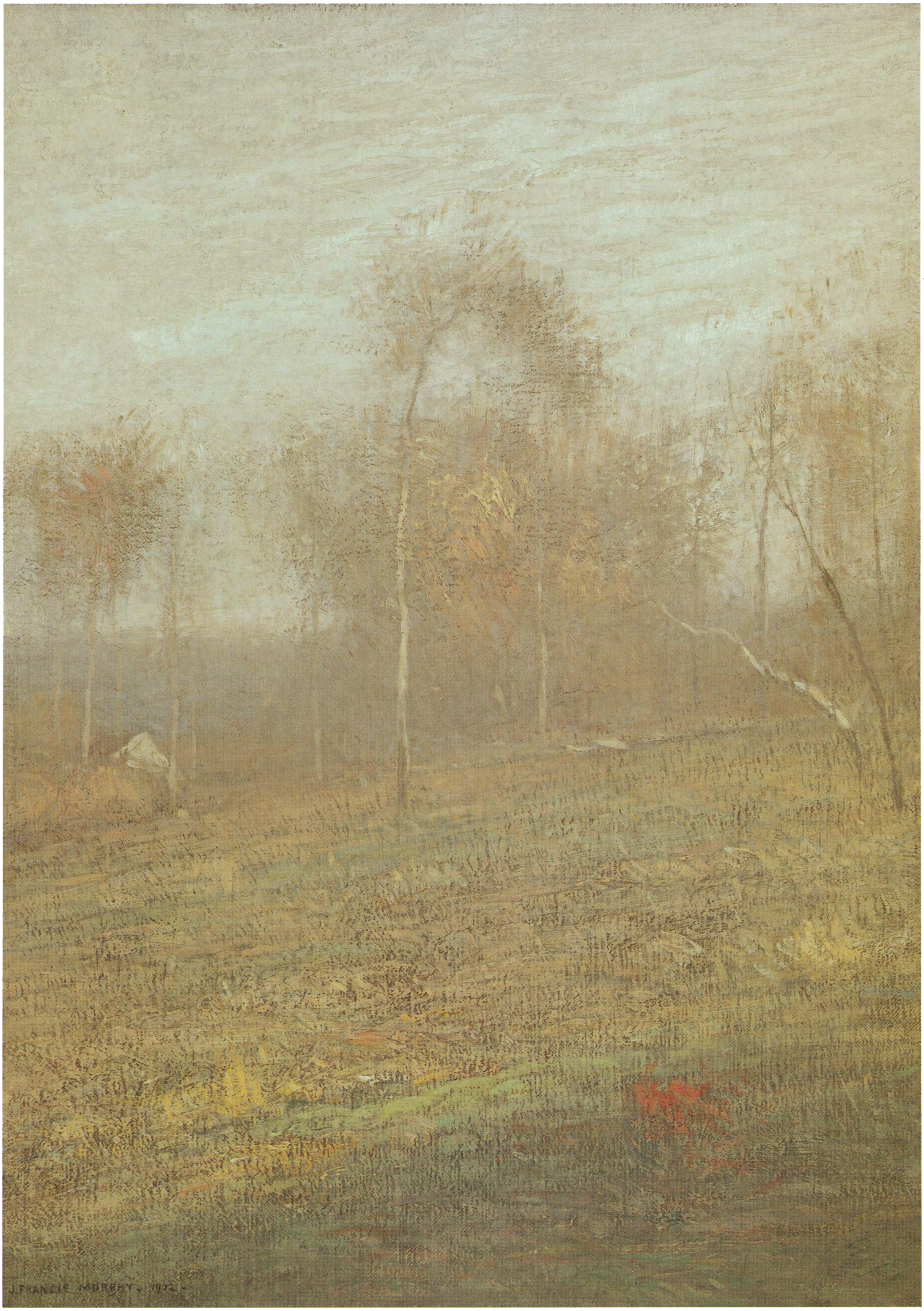

J.FRANCIS MURPHY - 1902 -

Fig. 35. J. Francis Murphy, *October Mist*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 22 x 16 in. Private collection.

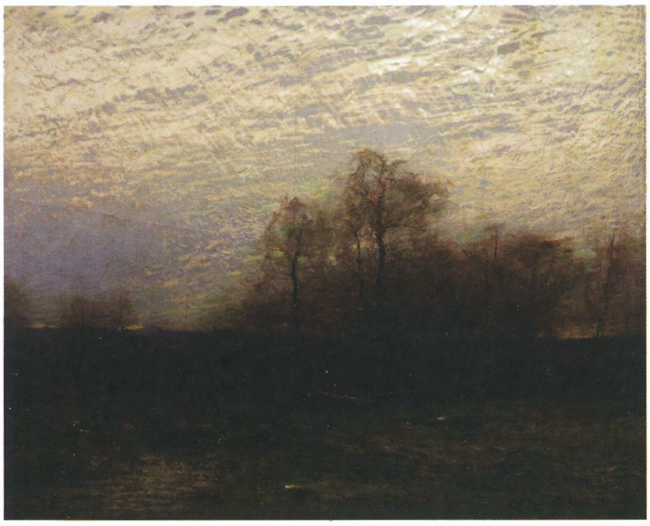


Fig. 36. Charles Melville Dewey, *Twilit Clouds*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 20 x 28 in. Private collection.

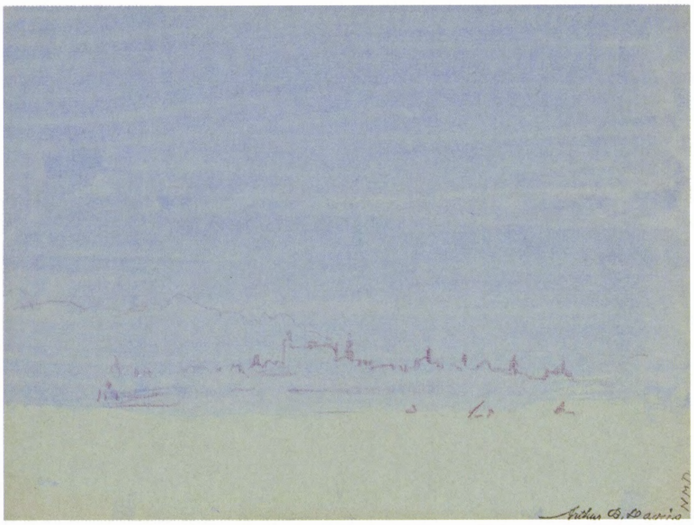


Fig. 37. Arthur Bowen Davies, *Blue Distance*, c. 1926. Watercolor, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

has already slipped far beneath the horizon, is found in Charles Harry Eaton's *Gloaming*, c. 1890 (fig. 32). Here, the blur of green tones and glazed, water-reflected light saturates the air, a poignant reminder, no more than a whisper, of the day's lingering heat, with only a tiny steeple at the apex of light on the horizon to bear witness.

Charles Warren Eaton's *Twilit Sky*, c. 1910 (fig. 33), shows how a masterful watercolorist can capture the saturated light of evening in his chosen medium. Eaton approximates the use of glazes in oil by employing innovative blotting techniques to impart a streaky granular quality to the fading sky—a haunting atmospheric effect that transfigures the setting with a spellbinding and tangible haze. In *Rainy Autumn Day*, 1914 (fig. 34), Ben Foster has explicitly captured the qualities of a rain-soaked fall afternoon with a damp blurring of forms (a design element furthered by the square canvas) that creates bewitching patterns across the landscape, a crisscrossing of stream banks, walls, and roads, so as to allow the eye a pensive recessional wandering until it reaches the backdrop of Connecticut's Cornwall hills and the proscenium gray of the sky. An even more dramatic and explicit rendition of meteorological effects is found in J. Francis Murphy's *October Mist*, 1906 (fig. 35), where the sumptuous veil of mist creates a softly muted, color-saturated field of modulated paint marks and glazing; the mist itself becomes both titular subject and the transformative essence of the scene—paint transmuted into air.

New York Times critic Charles de Kay, reviewing a William Sartain exhibit in 1905, notes, as he did in so many of his reviews, the microclimate so skillfully invoked by the artist (see Sartain's *Old Meadow* and *Nonquit*, figs. 59 and 77): "The structure of the landscape as it must have been when drawn on the canvas is softened and veiled until the effect is that of an atmosphere full of the vapor of the seashore. . . . There is great poetry of a Wordsworthian reserve and simplicity in this quiet seaside view. The ocean is not visible but it is implied."[18] De Kay does so again in his review of Charles Melville Dewey's work: "The earth hangs in that atmosphere of peace which strikes most poignantly upon the human heart accustomed to the warring of complex emotions."[19] This sentiment is perfectly evoked in Dewey's *Twilit Clouds*, c. 1910 (fig. 36), where a sky of soaring altocumulus clouds shrouds a melancholy fall landscape. Arthur Bowen Davies's *Blue Distance*, c. 1926 (fig. 37), takes the Tonalist fascination with atmosphere to its logical conclusion—near complete abstraction, where the envelope of air through which all objects are seen has become both subject and object. (Davies's late works—see *Misted Hills* and *Cloudscape*, figs. 61 and 62—predate by some thirty years Rothko's atmospheric multiforms, dramatically demonstrating the modernist impulses inherent in Tonalism.) As so many of the period titles indicate (*October Mist*, *Rainy Autumn Day*), the precise seasonal and meteorological circumstances of a painting, as much as the subjective feelings invoked, were themes of great moment for the Tonalists and their collectors.

5. A sense of movement or metamorphosis in nature (the vibration and refraction of tones)

In the age when Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was revolutionizing science and attitudes toward traditional religion and literary culture, the Tonalist artists, thoroughly steeped in Darwinism as well as the writings of Transcendentalists Thoreau and Emerson, keenly explored the hidden modalities of nature and the inexorable processes of evolution and metamorphosis operating beneath the surface of all things—processes of transformation mirrored in the very act of artistic creation itself. Atmosphere, weather, and seasonal light were transmitters not just of mood but of an energy field (intuited long before advances in physics revealed the invisible wave

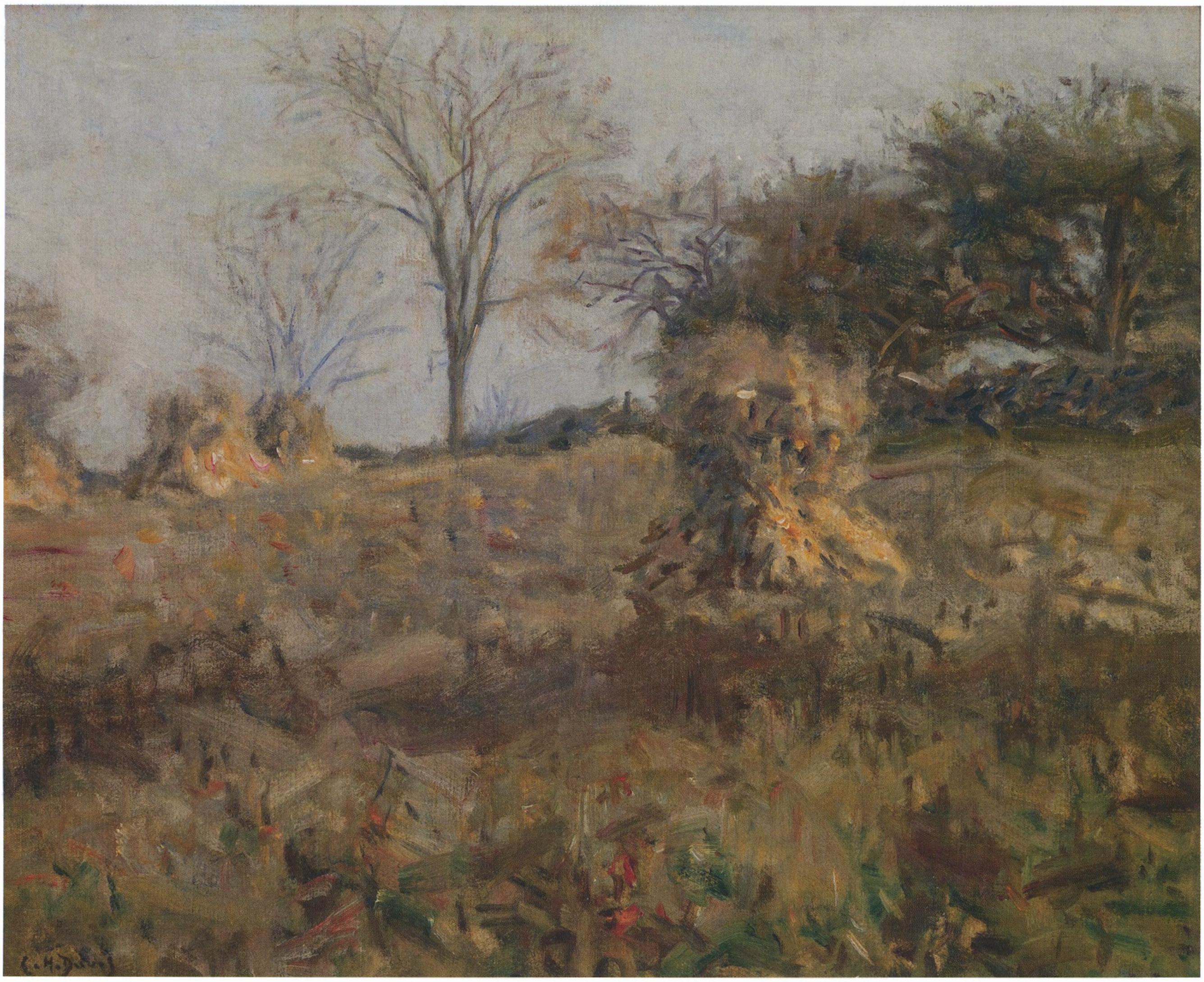


Fig. 38. Charles Harold Davis, *Autumn*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 16 x 21 in. Private collection.

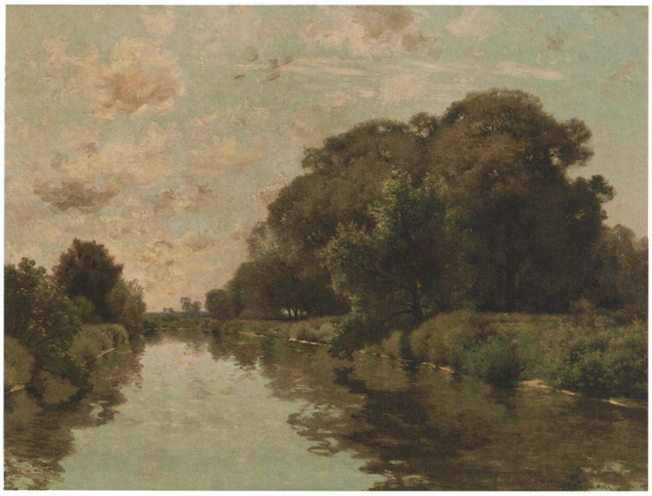


Fig. 39. Charles Harry Eaton, *Reflections*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 27 x 35 in. Private collection.

action of protons on the quantum scale) alive to the painter's touch. Technical advances assimilated by American artists working in Europe (see Birge Harrison on vibration and refraction on tones, p. 120) allowed artists to approximate the visual sensation of metamorphic light energy in nature by applying paint marks of similar tones in juxtaposition to one another, by way of *refraction*, or layering brush marks over a complementary ground tone, and *vibration*, in which cool overtones are painted freshly into warm undertones, with the undertones allowed to break through to the surface of the canvas. (Often the support or ground of the artwork was allowed to bleed through the paint layer, so achieving the same effect.) A technique employed by Whistler, vibration was understood well enough by the first decade of the century to be described in newspaper accounts, as here, in a 1907 review of the work of Henry Ward Ranger (see *Hillside Trees*, fig. 73) in the *Washington Times*: "The school of tonalism is founded upon the belief that color vibrations as they exist in nature can be secured as well by the underlaying and almost indefinite mixing of colors, as by the other method of securing 'vibrations' by laying the colors side by side."[20]

Such a strategy is superbly executed in J. Francis Murphy's *Summertime* and *Summer* (see figs. 2 and 3). In the early work *Summertime*, the foreground meadow grass to the right and left of the old farm road comprises green paint marks of varied

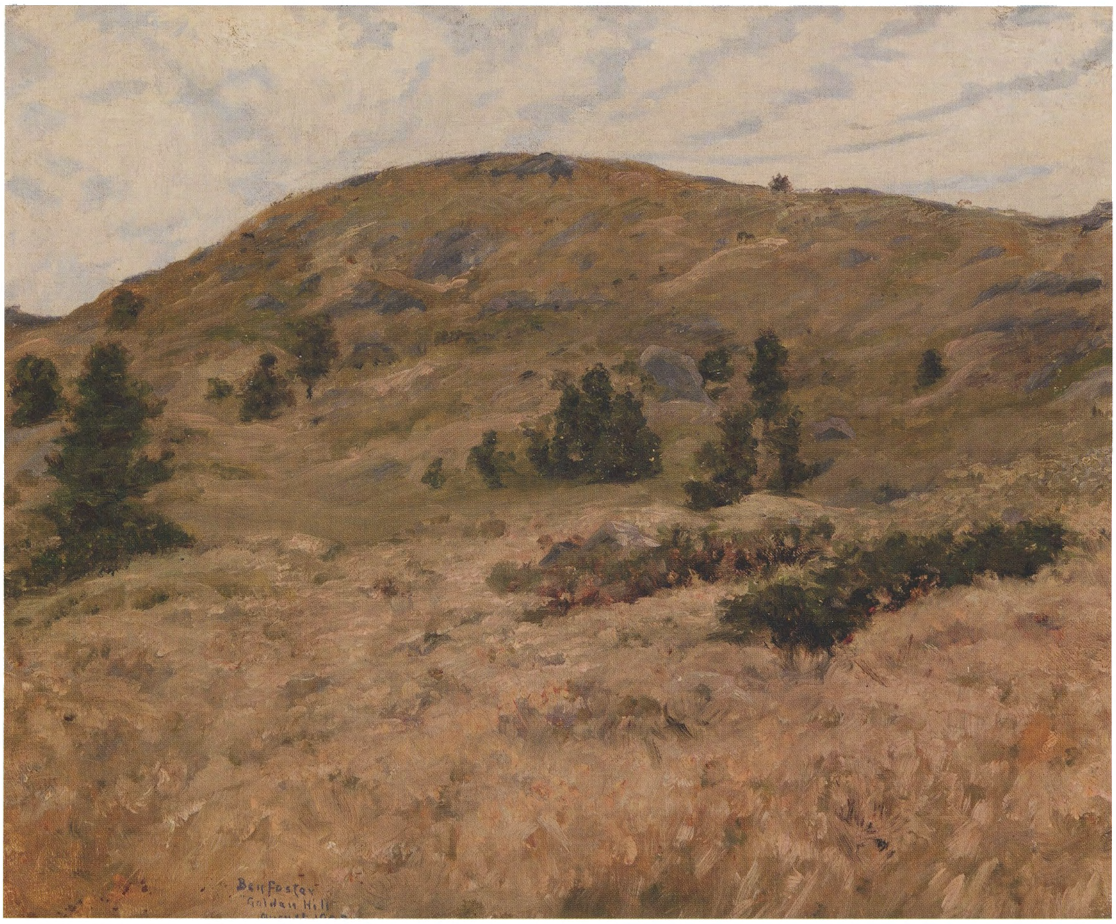

Ben Foster
Golden Hill

Fig. 40. Ben Foster, *Golden Hills*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 18 x 22 in. Private collection.

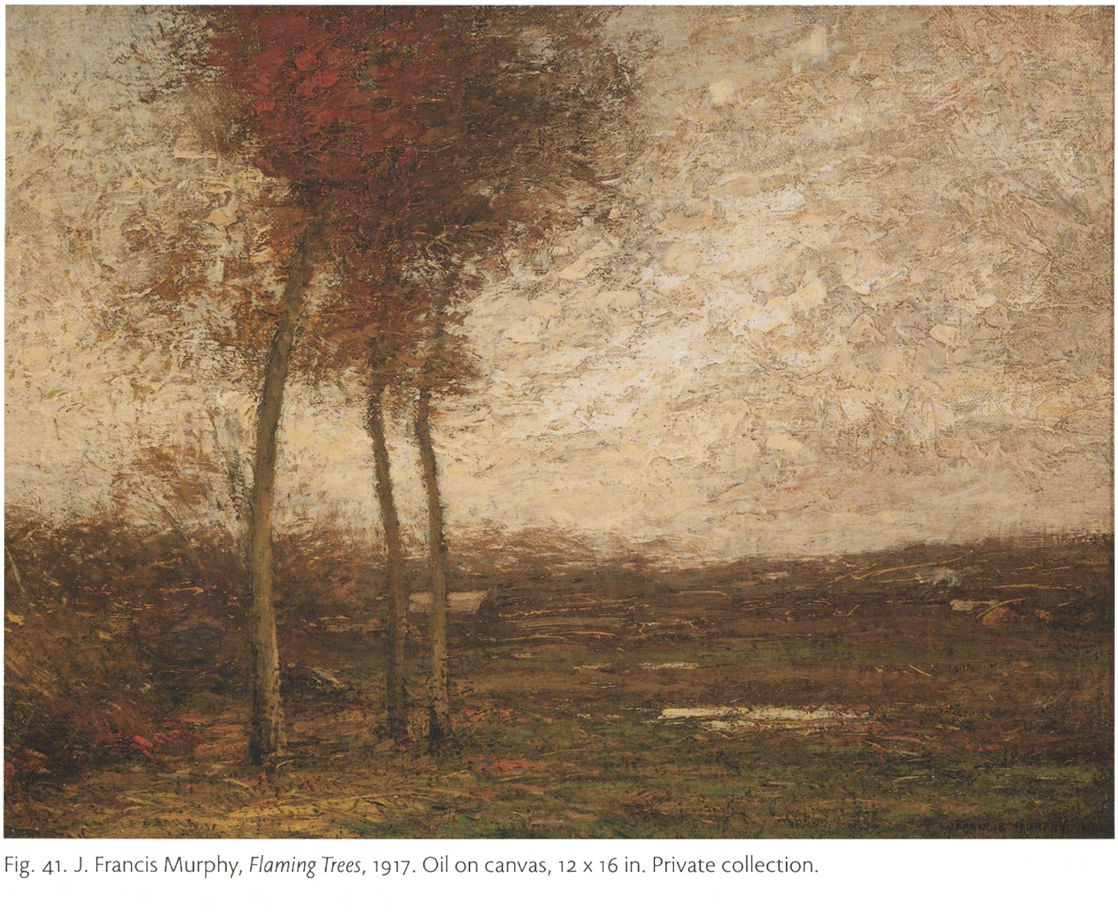


Fig. 41. J. Francis Murphy, *Flaming Trees*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

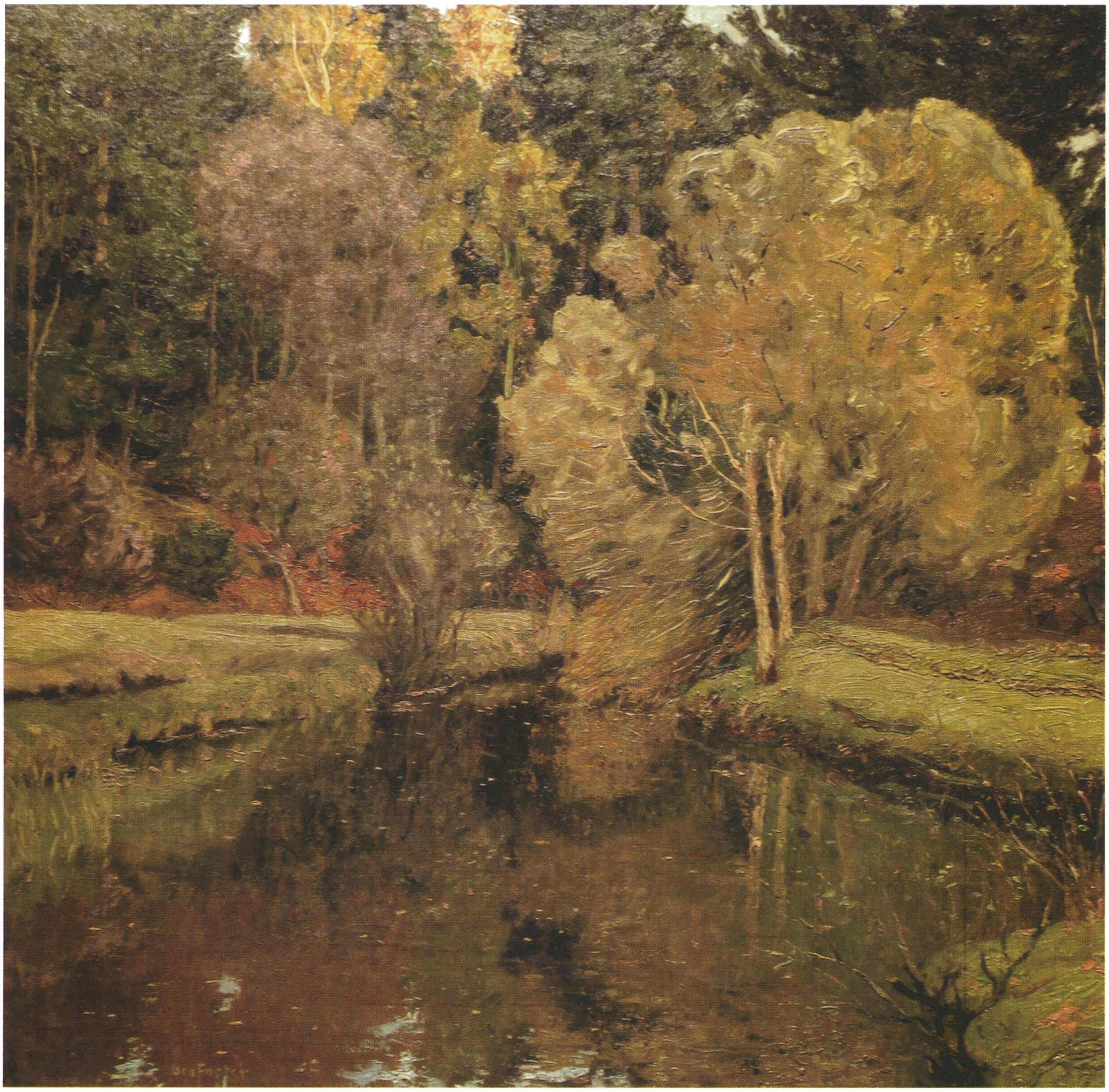


Fig. 42. Ben Foster, *Still Waters*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in. Private collection.

tones, placed cheek-by-jowl or overlaying the warm neutral ground, so that the greens have a visual jitter—vibration and refraction—as well as an uncanny visual approximation of an aural sensation: the hum of cicadas on a late summer day. The later *Summer* achieves much the same result but with the use of much broader and more expressive paint strokes. In *Autumn*, c. 1910 (fig. 38), Charles Harold Davis captures a similar effect, here using more broken and activated paint strokes that blur in the eye as the meadow is transformed under the fading seasonal light of fall. The haystacks and bare-branched trees provide yet another reminder of seasonal change. A close examination of the banks of the stream in Charles Harry Eaton's tour de force *Reflections*, c. 1910 (fig. 39), reveals the captivating effects achieved by placing a modulated array of green tones in juxtaposition to one another, describing both summer's scintillating light and a visual feeling of pulsing movement, as if the landscape is a living, breathing organism, which the reflected colors in the flowing stream only further enhance as they undergo yet another array of fluvial permutations. The steep hillside in Ben Foster's *Golden Hills*, 1910 (fig. 40), demonstrates how a similar effect can be achieved with various tones of burnt sienna, sap green, and soft yellow ocher. The rising slope, empty of the charming details—or distractions—usually associated with such scenes, comes alive in the activated paint surface, full of suggested motion as the blurred forms of scattered bushes and small trees swim in lazy upward patterns, endowing the otherwise ordinary with a fluid, inexpressibly vibrant beauty.

This sense of motion created by activated light and color was often remarked upon by period critics, as in Charles de Kay's review of Charles Melville Dewey's work (see figs. 9

and 36): "[The light] winds its way among the foliage, strays across the backs of the idle sheep, strikes the reflecting surface of a pool, and plays the part of the joy-bringing god Apollo in this cosmic drama. Under its influence all the subtleties of color in the chromatic pattern fall into order and harmony as dancers move to music. The complication of the foreground [is] flexibly unrolled to express in sensitive modulations the gradual recession of the landscape and the perfect equilibrium between the fluent mists of distance and these sharp notes of foreground interest . . ."[21] Perhaps the most daring, subtle, and technically astute employment of this method of tonal vibration and refraction is found in J. Francis Murphy's late works, such as *Flaming Trees*, 1917 (fig. 41), in which the reds and scarlets in the foreground tree fairly throb with compressed energy, while the broad sky behind it, a craggy, variegated paint surface comprising an array of whites and nacreous grays, provides a prismatic backdrop activated as much by color juxtaposition as the scumbled, flattened, and slashed paint. The craggy surface is then illuminated by the prevailing light, absorbing and reflecting a near-infinite array of tones. Murphy, like his fellow Tonalist Ralph Blakelock, was a master craftsman at creating such multifaceted surface textures that approximate the transformative face of nature while at the same time manifesting sensations of refraction and vibration in the eye of the beholder—an atmospheric envelope almost alive with intuited life. Virtuosos of glazing techniques, such as George Inness and Dwight Tryon, often employed multiple layers of glazes—color pigments infused in varnish and oil—to create prismatic gemlike surfaces that emanated a kaleidoscopic array of scintillating color, responding, like the landscape itself, to various lighting conditions. Such is the case with a masterpiece by Ben Foster, *Still Waters*, c. 1910 (fig. 42), which strikingly belies its title, in that the imagery of reflected trees in a stream glitters with teeming visual sensations, multifarious colors of the passing season that vibrate in the eye and so hint at the breeze stirring the blur of leaf-laden branches. The rustle of sere autumn leaves is almost perceptible.

6. The use of expressive paint handling to embody emotion or mimic the felt life of nature

As previously discussed, Expressive Tonalism became commonplace around 1900, but what is particularly noteworthy about the Tonalists is just how early in the 1880s expressive gestural paint handling came to the fore, especially among the most progressive artists, such as John Twachtman, J. Frank Currier, Henry Muhrman, and William Gedney Bunce, who were exposed to the teaching of the Munich school, which put a premium on flashy and dexterous paint handling derived from the example of the old masters, especially Frans Hals and Diego Velázquez. J. Frank Currier's watercolor masterpiece, *Setting Sun*, c. 1880 (fig. 43), displays a freedom and

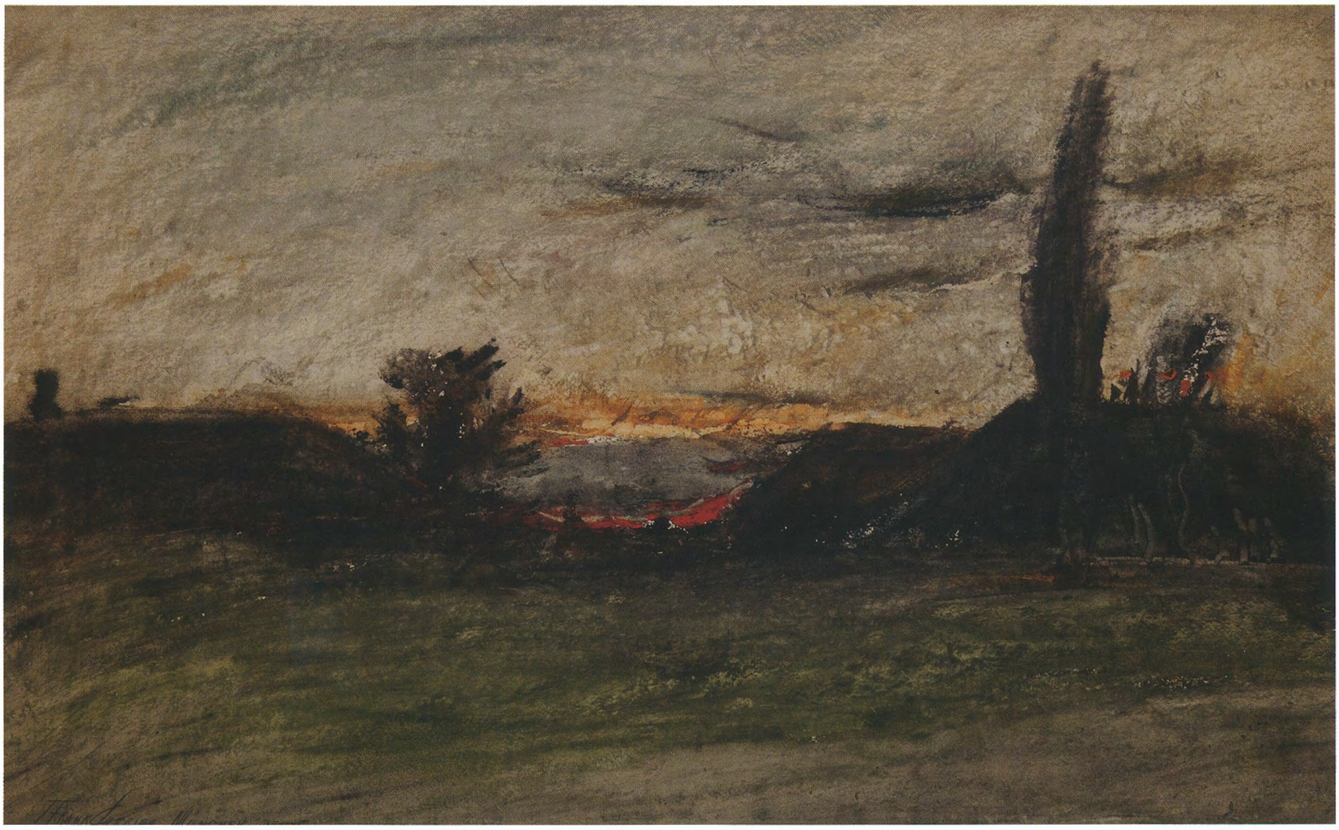


Fig. 43. J. Frank Currier, *Setting Sun*, c. 1880. Watercolor, 15 x 26 in. Private collection.

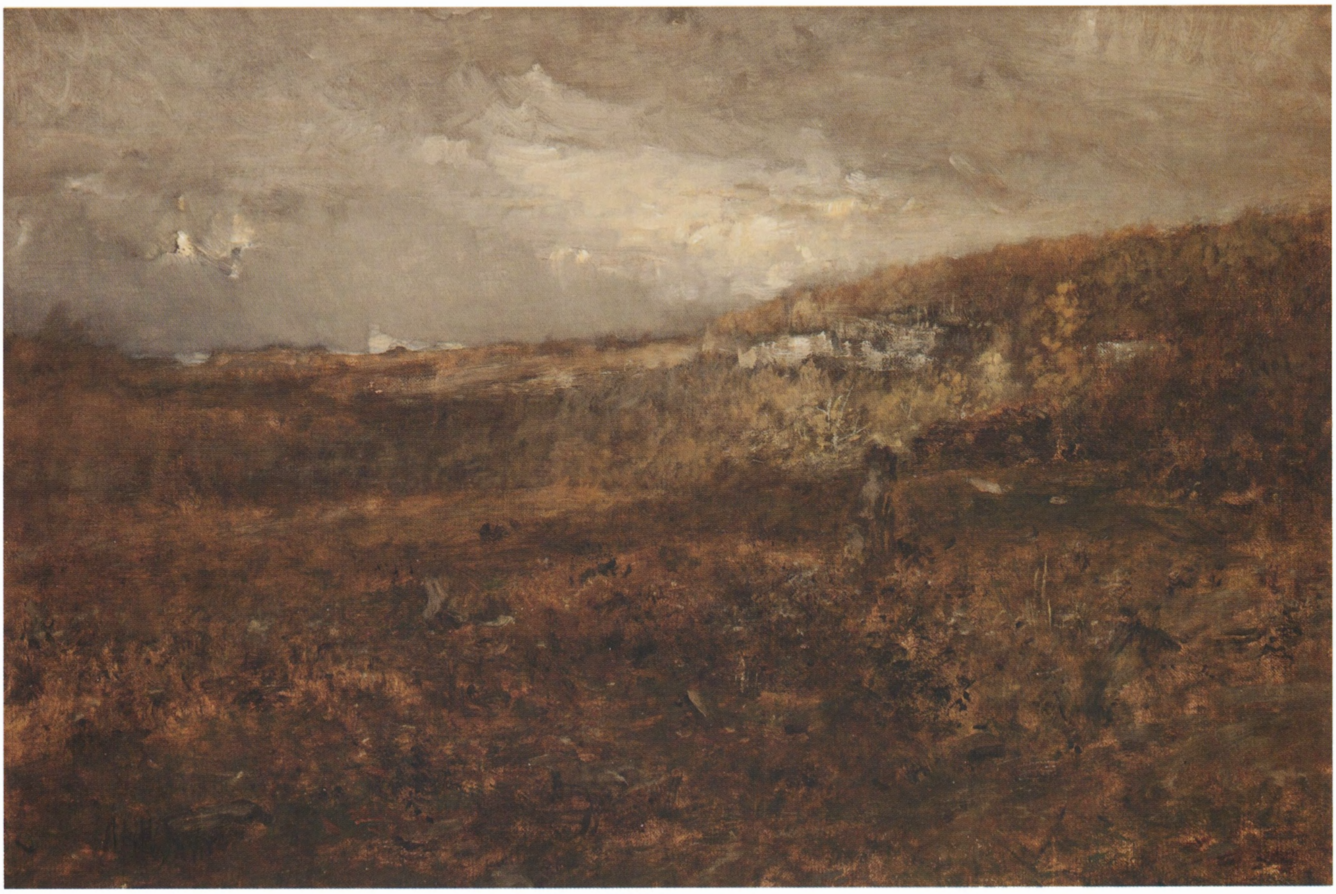


Fig. 44. Alexander Wyant, *Gray Hills*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Private collection.

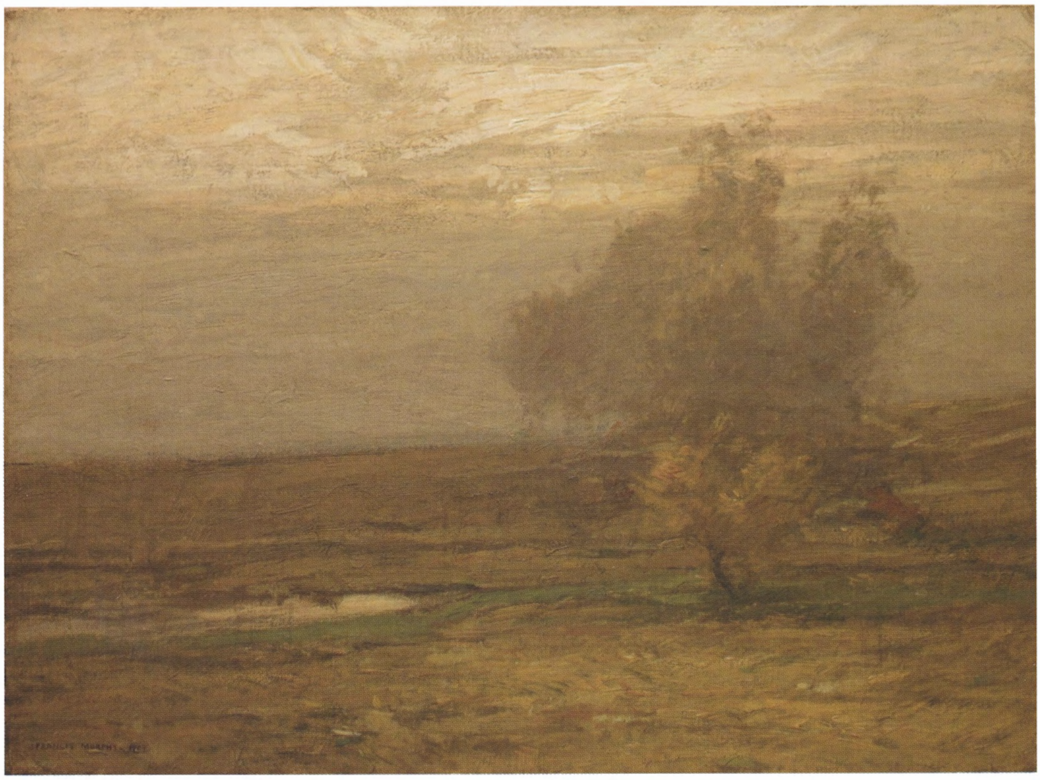


Fig. 45. J. Francis Murphy, *April*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 14 x 19 in. Private collection.

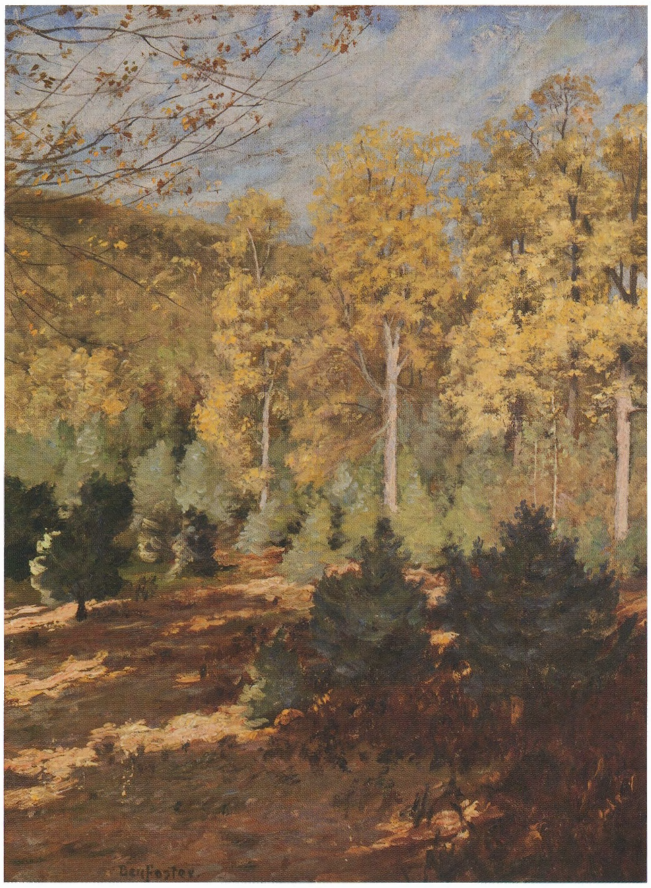


Fig. 46. Ben Foster, *Yellow Foliage*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 24 x 18 in. Private collection.

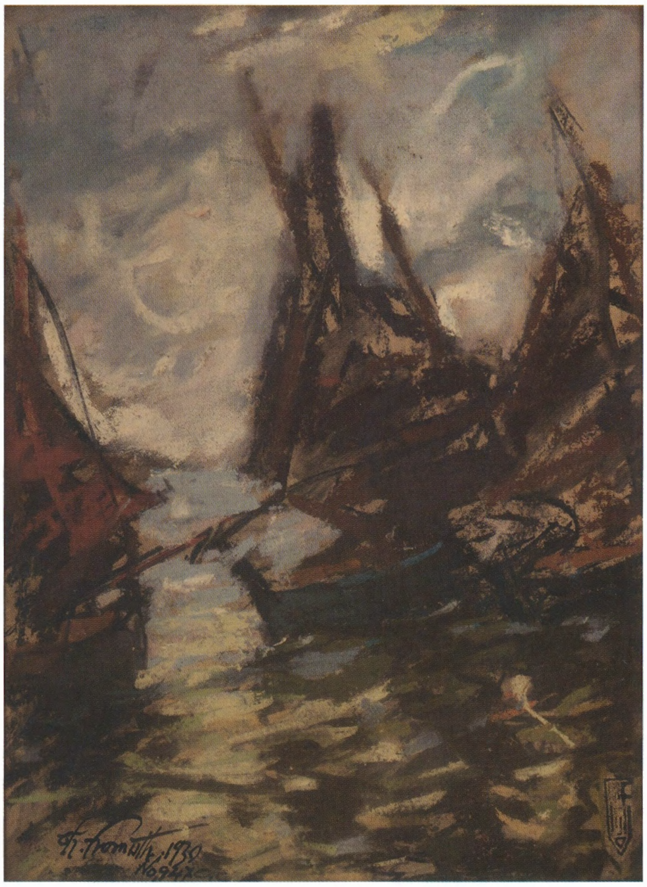


Fig. 47. Charles Fromuth, *Wind and Sea*, 1930. Pastel, 19 x 12 in. Private collection.

inventiveness that places him far ahead of most of his contemporaries in either America or Europe. Here, manipulating the surface with slashing, expressive strokes of color that literally abrade the paper ground, Currier creates a surface energy that approximates nature's underlying forces while augmenting the inherent symbolic power of landscape forms: trees, rooflines, clouds, distant horizon, and the agitated atmosphere that encloses them. (Only Gustave Courbet, Whistler, and Degas, especially in his pastel and monotype landscapes of the 1890s, approached Currier's radical and exuberant freedom of expression at this early date.) Alexander Wyant, at about the same time, in his extraordinarily precocious *Gray Hills*, 1879 (fig. 44), manages to capture the brooding stormy face of nature by using mostly abstract paint marks to create his dramatic landscape, mirroring the intuited energies pervading such a wilderness scene. Only a few linear marks, depicting silver birch trunks, can be detected anywhere in the composition. It is hard to think of another artist at this date, American or European, who could render a subject with such untrammeled freedom and subjective power. William Gedney Bunce is yet another Tonalist who used a slashing style of paint handling in the early 1880s as a method to indulge his love of gestural abstraction, with his later works gaining even greater power, until his work neared almost complete dissolution of form. As noted above, *Venezia* (see fig. 15) is a dazzling example of Bunce's exuberant use of color in an expansive sky, that is as much about the dynamic and luminous atmosphere of dusk as the artist's intuited expression, as if Bunce sought a merging of hand and eye with the arrayed light sources refracted from sky to lagoon, an immensity of supersaturated air barely contained by the panel. J. Francis Murphy's masterful *April*, 1909 (fig. 45), though subdued in subject, nevertheless pulses with energetic brushstrokes that rush in slathered horizontals across the canvas, broken only by depictions of ghostly tree forms. Such transitional seasons were a favorite of Murphy, who like so many of his colleagues, took delight in expressing nature's changes in the sumptuous ebb and flow of rich pigment. *Yellow Foliage*, c. 1910 (fig. 46), by Ben Foster, although more constrained in its flurry of leafy yellow brushstrokes, seeks a similar approximation between the means of paint handling and the fall breeze playing across the receding tree line. By 1930, Charles Fromuth's marine subject *Wind and Sea* (fig. 47) has moved toward near complete obliteration of form in the depiction of sea, sky, and Concarneau's sardine boats plunging through the waves: all the forces of nature alloyed together in seamless interaction.

7. The use of formal strategies of embedded patterns and the decorative deployment of natural and abstract forms (derived from Whistler and influenced by Asian art), often in conjunction with serial renderings of the same subject in different lights and from various angles of perception

As we have seen in the previous discussion of Aesthetic and Expressive Tonalism, Whistler first became a force in American art circles in the 1880s, when the formal devices of Asian art were being adopted by the most progressive artists of the era; and Aesthetic Tonalism became the lingua franca of the earlier adopters of Tonalism as they broke with the Hudson River School. These formal characteristics remained central throughout the forty-odd years when the Tonalist movement was at its height. *Venice, Fishing Boats*, 1886 (fig. 48), by William Gedney Bunce, illustrates how landscape design constructs can be translated to a marine setting. The artist has arranged his sail shapes and their twin watery reflections in perfectly modulated patterns—a grid of horizontal and vertical shapes—to create a sense of equipoise that appeals as much to the mind's eye as the simple delight at sails filled by a following breeze. Bunce would employ this conceptualist technique throughout his career, prompting a 1902 reviewer in the *New York Times* to the observation: "Sometimes Mr. Bunce surrenders himself to the pleasure of executing his marines and cares nothing for actualities . . . in which the buildings are treated like trees placed here and there, made symmetrical so as to balance each other in the composition, all without regard to terrestrial fact. . . . [The artist takes] the liberty of dotting campaniles round just for the fun of seeing how they will look."[22] Likewise, Bunce deployed sail shapes the way Giorgio Morandi arranged bottles in his still lifes: composing repetitions and variations in which translucent forms are so artfully deployed as to appeal both as decorative ensembles and as interacting objects in space, at once ambiguous (two-dimensional or three-?) and static, where the positive and negative spaces also come alive beneath our fascinated gaze.

An early landscape masterwork of such legerdemain is Charles Harry Eaton's *Summer Song*, c. 1890 (fig. 49), in which the artist arranges a mind-boggling array of natural forms in so many interlacing patterns that the full extent of these deft interactions may defy analysis, leaving the beholder to simply enjoy the pleasing multitudinous patterns. One can stare for minutes and hours, beguiled by the shapes of the middle-ground bushes and young saplings as they march in formation into the distance; by the regiment of boulders and outcroppings in the foreground, which speak their own silent language; by the tussocks interspersed within their ranks; by the zigzag processional of riparian landforms wandering into the background; and by the patchwork of blue lifted just above the horizon, which adds its own harmonious note to the whole.

By the turn of the century, the synthetic arrangement of natural forms was a commonplace in Tonalist art and a logical adjunct to a studio-based, fundamentally conceptualist art, as opposed to the Impressionist stress on working *en plein air* to capture the prevailing quality of light at a given moment.

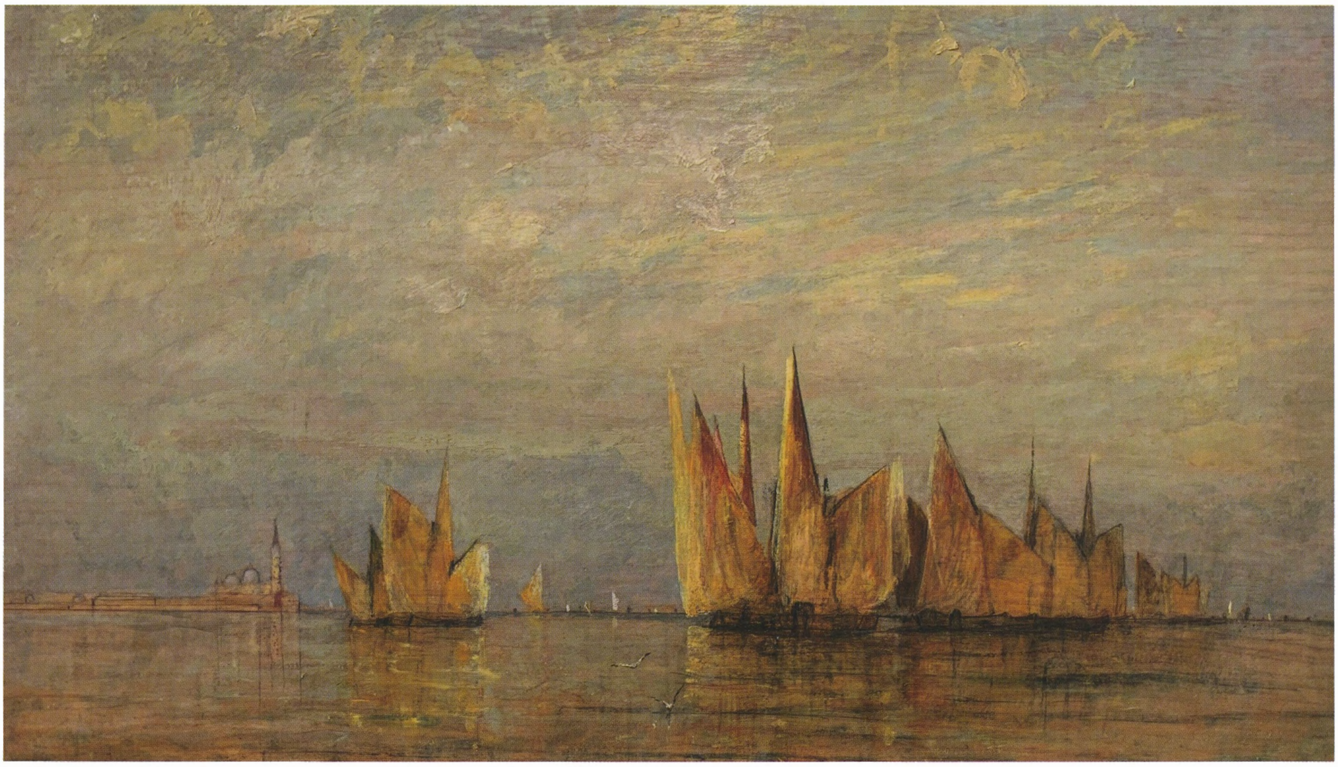


Fig. 48. William Gedney Bunce, *Venice, Fishing Boats*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 14 x 26 in. Private collection.

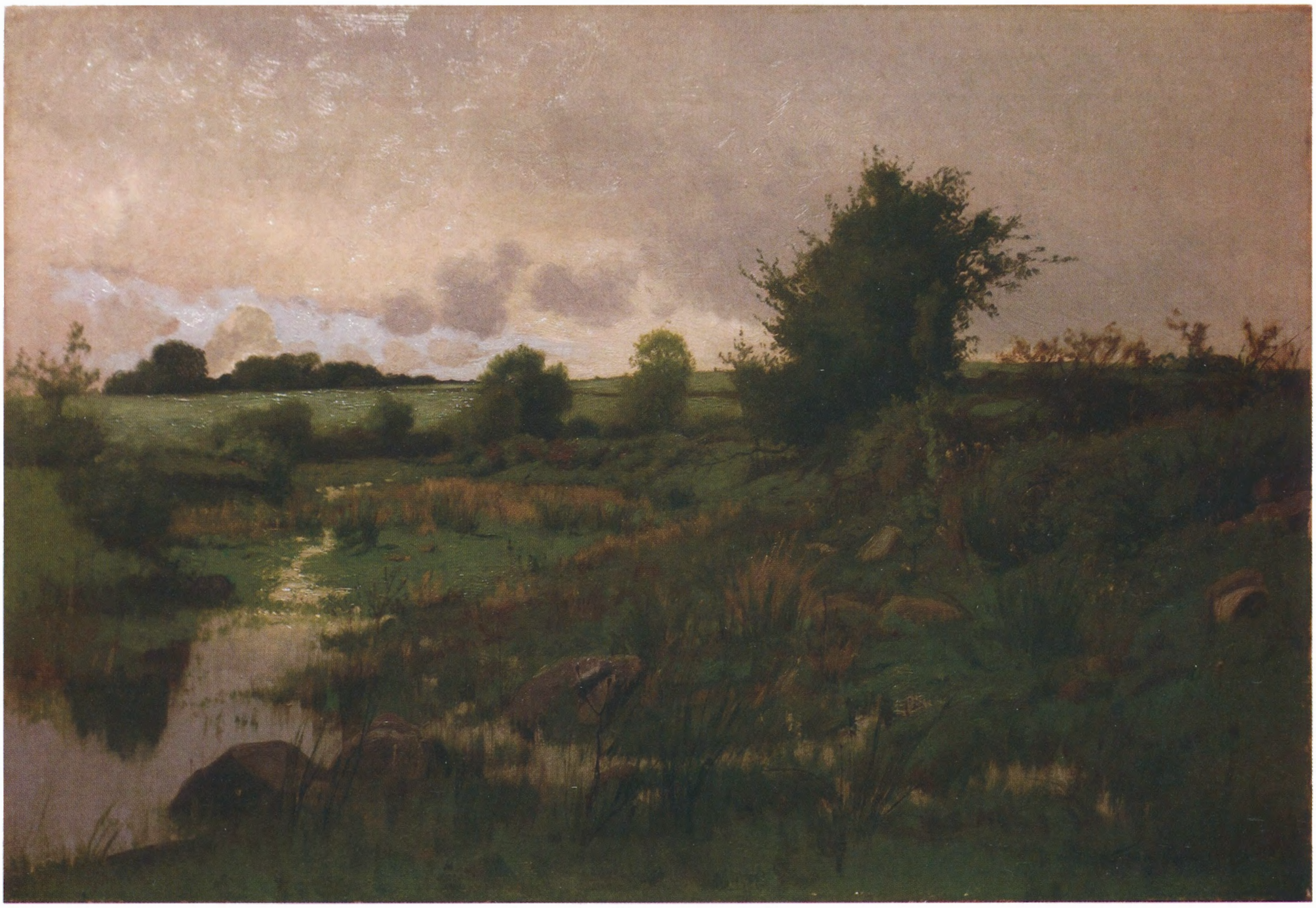


Fig. 49. Charles Harry Eaton, *Summer Song*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 15 x 24 in. Private collection.

Dwight Tryon's *Spring Pasture*, 1899 (fig. 50), a delicate pastel inspired by the work of Whistler, displays this artist's love of early-budding spring trees, set in lines and forming patterned intervals of vertical forms against a spare horizontal backdrop, in turn dramatizing the branching masses of the boughs—created from the dun-colored paper—and the apertures between them, a kind of repeated melodic passage dear to poet and artist alike. Tree forms, cropped into more solid architectonic shapes, are found often in Ben Foster's work (see *Hillside Trees*, fig. 23) and, most spectacularly and successfully, in Emil Carlsen's abstracting tour de force *White Pine*, 1926 (fig. 51). Both the vertical and horizontal structure of the pine, here dramatically cropped, creates a dappled grid of light and dark shapes, patterns that tantalize the eye as they foreshadow the complete abstraction of Clifford Still or the more severe vertical abstractions of Barnett Newman.

Hugh Bolton Jones's *Winter Light*, c. 1900 (fig. 52), demonstrates another instance of zigzag patterning, here of snowy banks complemented by low hills and skyline horizontals that offset the vertical elements of the winter-shorn trees. Foster's *Back from the Sea*, c. 1910 (fig. 53), takes a much more complex arrangement of dune grasses and teases out an array of light and dark patterns with a spellbinding intensity, an approximation of the wave action intuited or perhaps glimpsed just to left of the highest dune. Similarly, Henry Snell's *Cornwall Coast*, c. 1900 (fig. 54), teases out the landscape patterns of a coastal scene with color forms in the foreground, middle, and distance depicted in varying greens and earth tones that transform what would, in less skilled hands, be a clichéd pictorial rendering into something that both delights and intrigues the

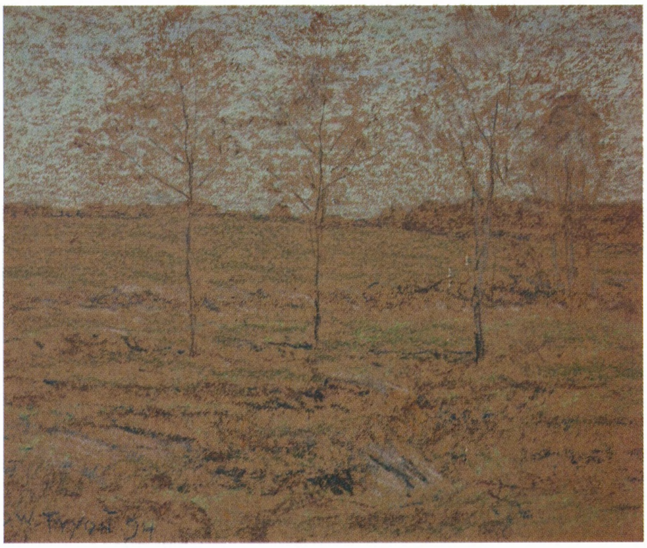


Fig. 50. Dwight Tryon, *Spring Pasture*, 1899. Pastel, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

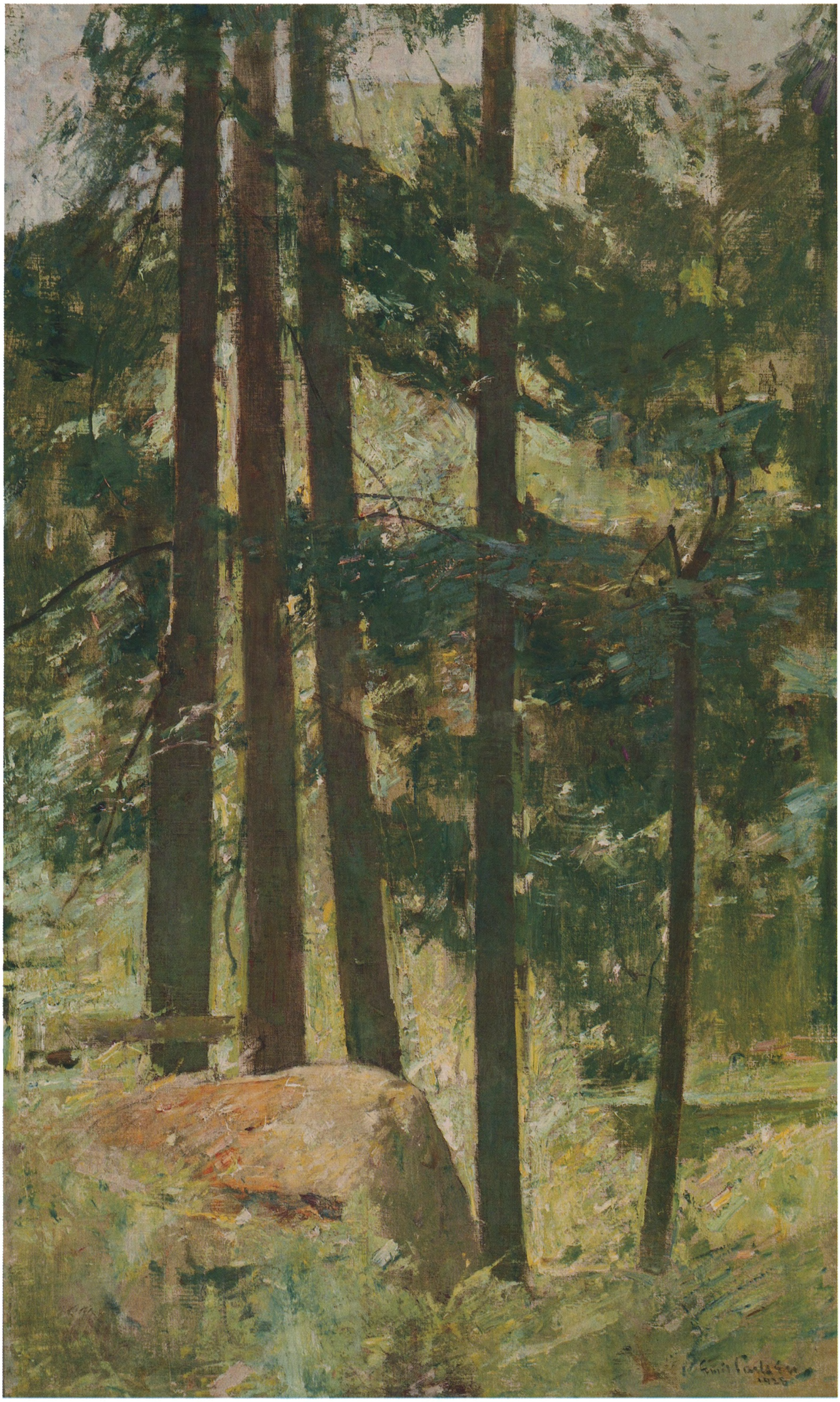


Fig. 51. Emil Carlsen, *White Pine,* 1926. Oil on canvas, 35 x 21 in. Private collection.

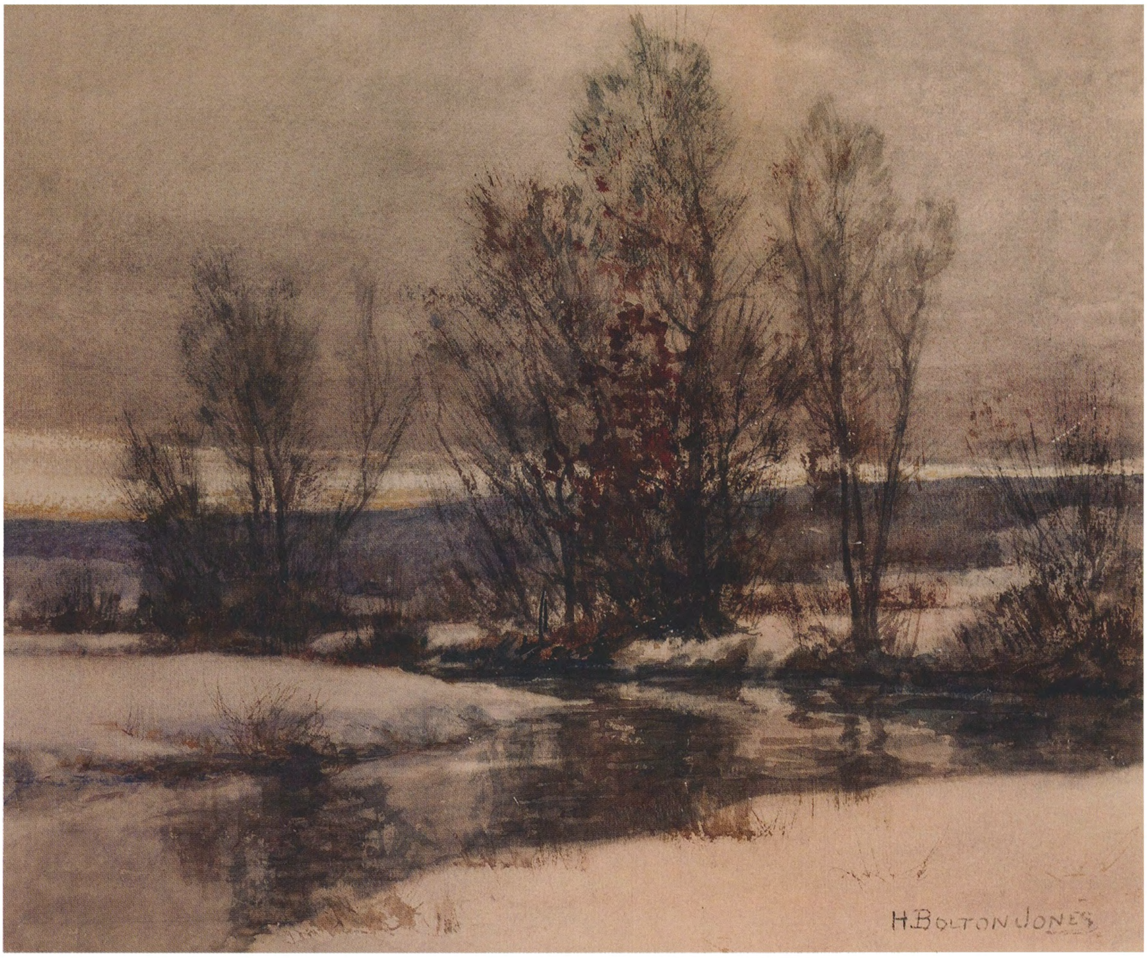


Fig. 52. Hugh Bolton Jones, *Winter Light*, c. 1900. Watercolor, 12 x 14 in. Private collection.

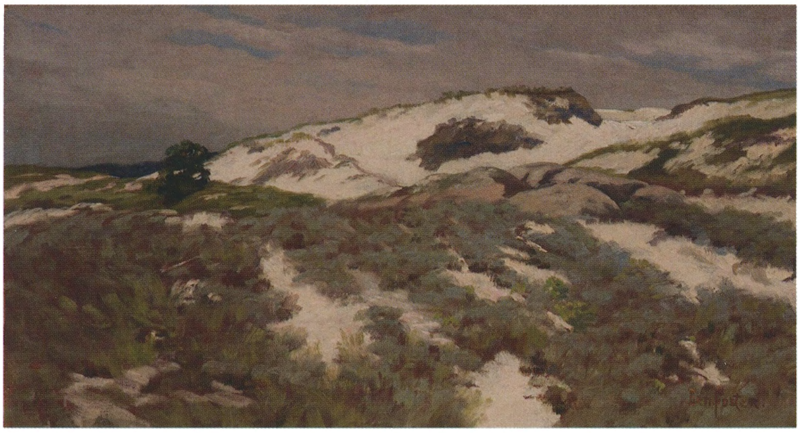


Fig. 53. Ben Foster, *Back from the Sea*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 12 x 22 in. Private collection.

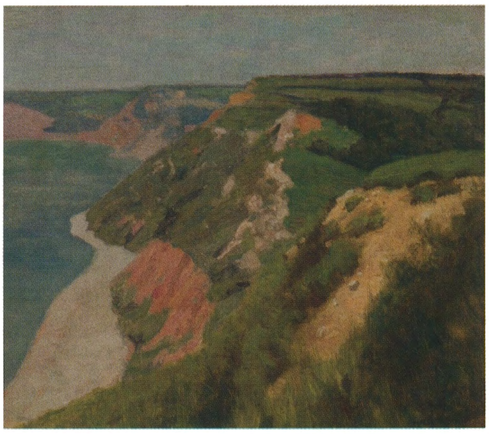


Fig. 54. Henry Snell, *Cornwall Coast*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 11 x 13 in. Private collection.

eye. Frank Duveneck, in his *Antiques Shop*, c. 1900 (fig. 55), certainly inspired by Whistler's Chelsea shop fronts, created an exquisitely designed grid of verticals and horizontals on a small scale, using rapid brushwork to sumptuous effect. Adding a touch of mystery and ambiguity is the hint of an interior, and perhaps a standing figure, in the otherwise dark doorway. Henry Muhrman, in his *From the Terrace*, c. 1900 (fig. 56), also aligns himself with the Chelsea master's London circle, here by virtue of his deft placement of both organic and human forms on the front plane of his pastel, providing an engaging medley of tonal interactions that emphasizes the underlying abstraction of the everyday.

The finest practitioners of these synthetic and formal arrangements of landscape forms were able to reassemble their

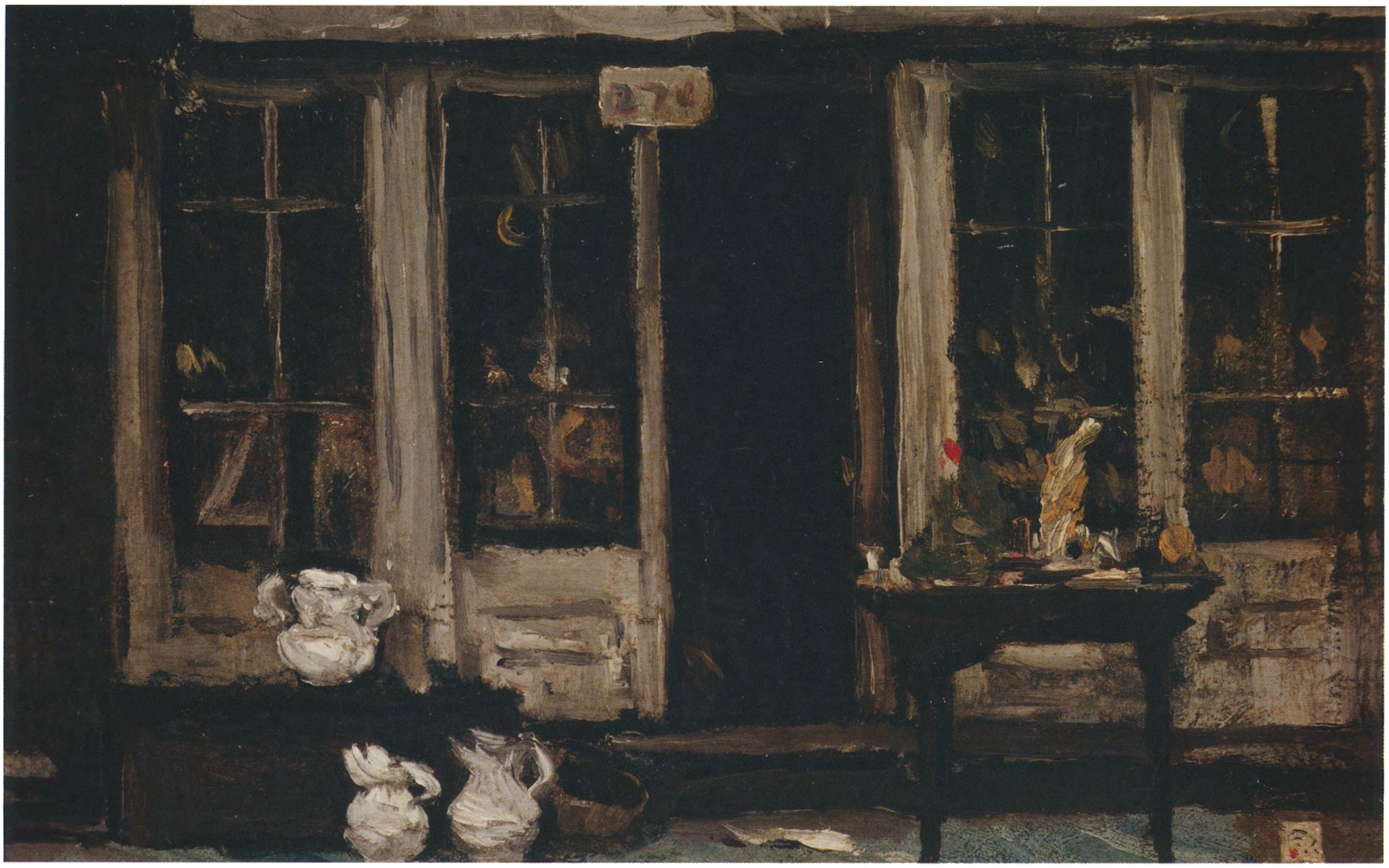


Fig. 55. Frank Duveneck, *Antiques Shop*, c. 1900. Oil on panel, 4 x 7 in. Private collection.

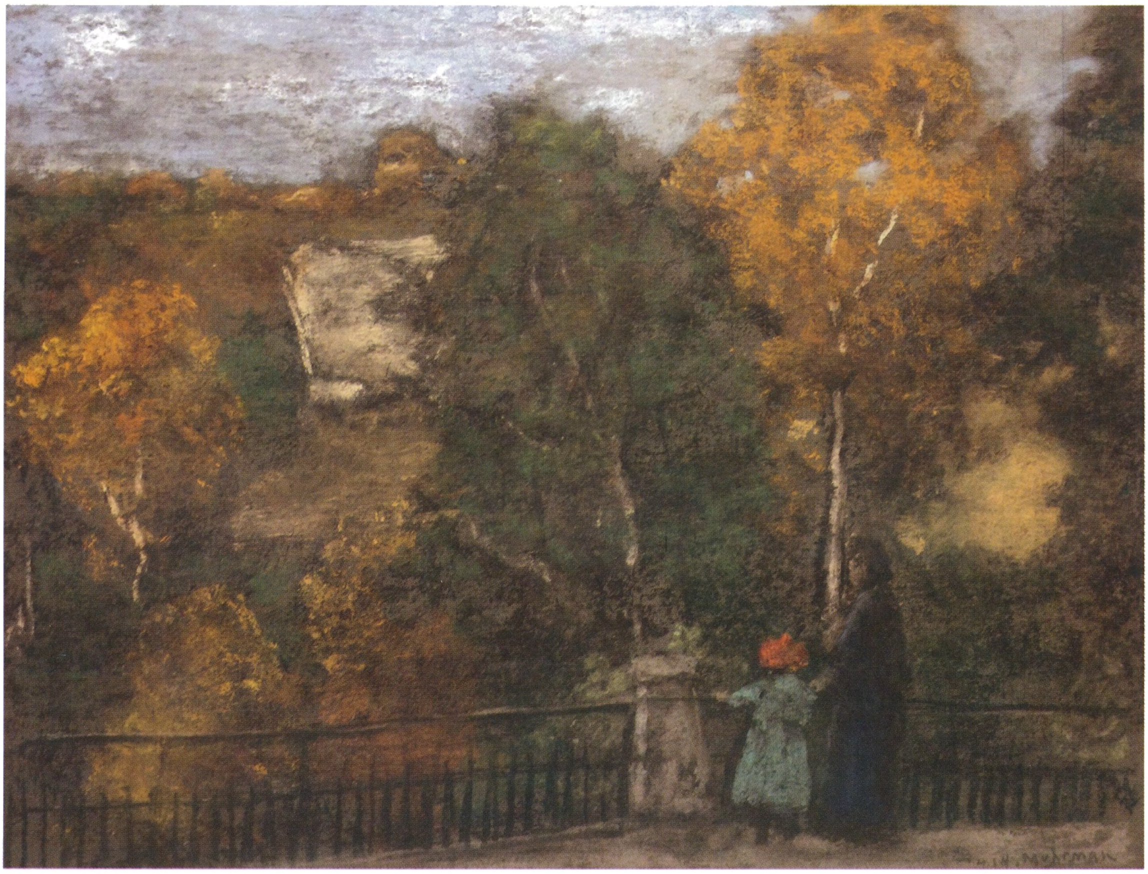


Fig. 56. Henry Muhrman, *From the Terrace*, c. 1900. Pastel, 8 x 12 in. Private collection.

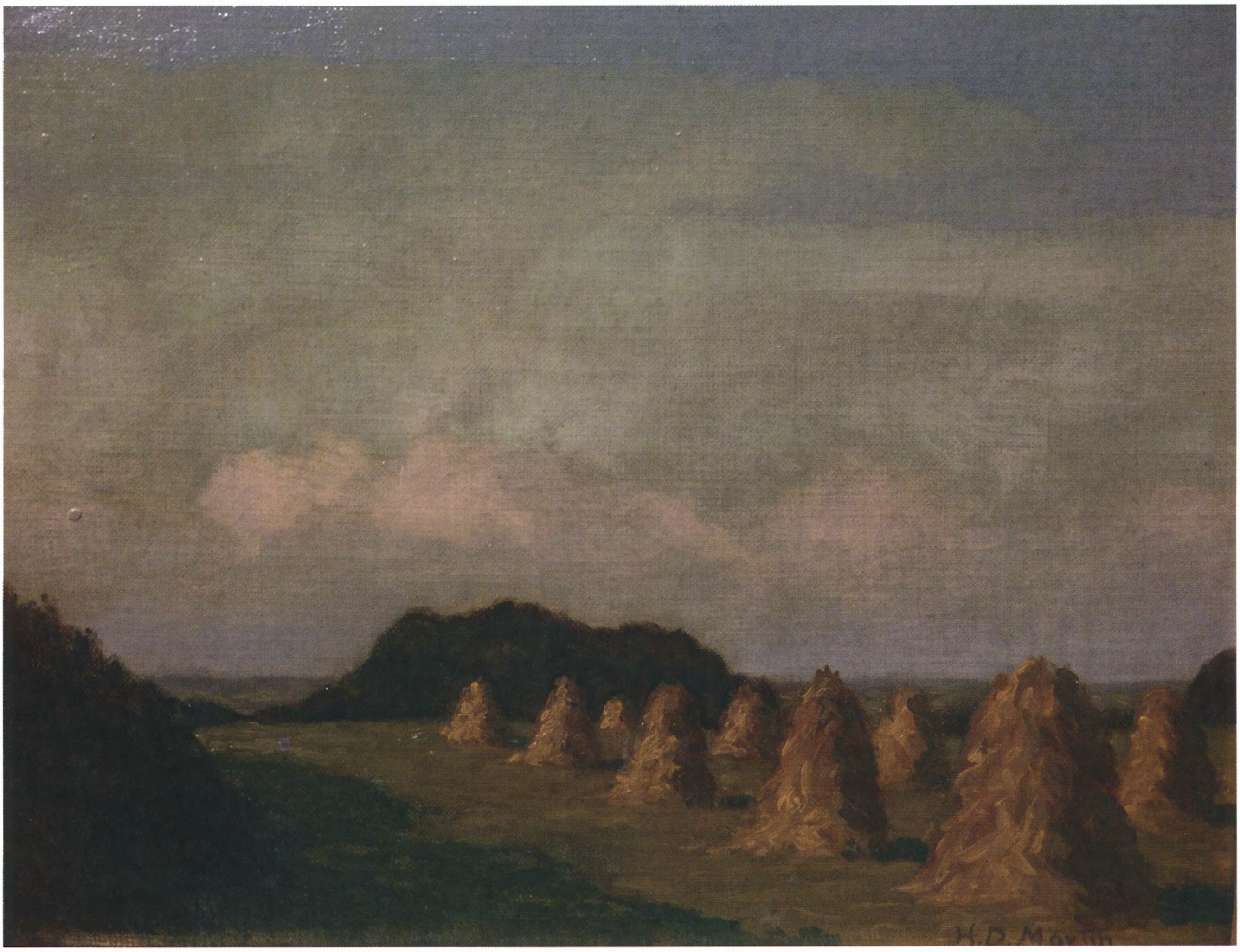


Fig. 57. Homer Dodge Martin, *Autumn Upper New York,* c. 1900. Oil on panel, 10 x 12 in. Private collection.

elements so that the artificial patterns created a subtle echoing effect on the eye, often in uncanny, even haunting ensembles that tantalize our sense of space and time, and so sound the underlying physical armature of the biosphere, measure for measure. Homer Dodge Martin's *Autumn Upper New York,* c. 1900 (fig. 57), accomplishes this magnificently on a small scale, setting up a rhythmic recession of his haystacks under a serene sky that bathes the scene in an otherworldly luminosity, further elucidating the patterns of the composition while emphasizing the seasonal play of thinning sunlight. In this way, under the artist's gaze, nature reflects a supersensible reality more profound than the mundane imagery captured in a conventional snapshot view.

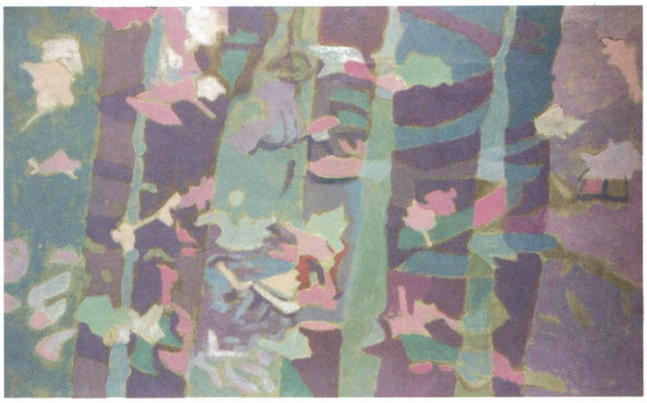


Fig. 58. Ralph Wickiser, *Blue Shadows*, 1982. Oil on canvas, 10 x 16 in. Private collection.

The culmination of such formal strategies can be found in the works of many talented contemporary artists, such as *Blue Shadows*, 1982 (fig. 58), by postmodern Tonalist Ralph Wickiser, in which the tree reflections and shadows cast upon the face of a stream have been translated into a tantalizing composition that exploits the dazzling effects created by light patterns intersected by floating leaves. The artist, by teasing out, abstracting, and rearranging some of nature's most enduring symbols—using blue tonalities as a formal device to unify the structure—has created a visual feast for the eye as well as the mind, echoing the kind of delight at nature's endless epiphanies found throughout Thoreau's journals.

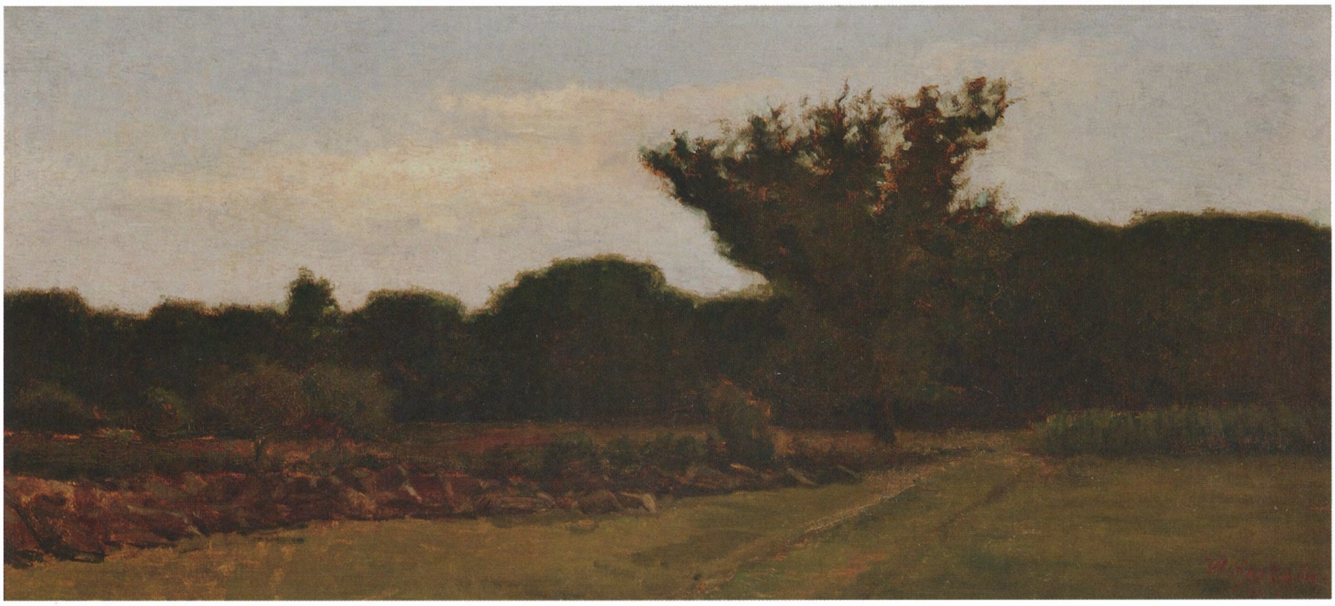


Fig. 59. William Sartain, *Old Meadow*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 10 x 24 in. Private collection.

8. The use of soft-edged forms to further the sense of ambiguity and mystery of place (known as lost-edge technique in the nineteenth century)

Given the Tonalists' fondness for the Transcendentalist authors Emerson and Thoreau and their naturalist followers such as John Burroughs and John Muir, it is hardly surprising that a subjective feeling for the underlying mystery and wonder inherent in the natural world should be all-pervasive. A critical stylistic aspect of this artistic outlook is a tendency to ambiguity of form as opposed to more detailed depiction, soft-edged forms as opposed to hard, and an emphasis on blurry atmospheric edges originally derived from the Venetian tradition of *colore* (color as the basis of art) versus the Florentine tradition of *disegno* (drawing or design as the basis of art). William Sartain's *Old Meadow*, c. 1890 (fig. 59), demonstrates how this technical resource turns a relatively straightforward landscape, with its stress on horizontal masses, into a scene of haunting mystery, in which the soft-edged blurred forms of trees and bushes seem to have a hazy, ineffable presence, as if slightly unstable and ever shifting across our field of vision. Balancing the soft-edged forms are a few hard-edged paint marks in the fieldstone walls and the edge of the old farm track; these anchor the eye and offer counterpoint to the tantalizing fluidity of the whole. Charles Melville Dewey's *Long Island Sunset* (see fig. 9) is a classic example of the use of soft-edged forms to create a sense of ambiguity and timelessness, in which half-seen and hinted presences heighten our sense of yearning and wonder. This impression of eerie displacement and the disquiet of half-revealed forms finds an echo in Charles de Kay's review in the *New York Times* of a Leonard Ochtman exhibition of 1905: "In 'Moonrise' there is the mystery of a half light from the veiled moon; in this a haystack on the left of the swale is just visible and trees are seen in the distance to the right faintly silhouetted against the sky. The mystery of a veiled moon is deep in 'Night,' where the effect of silence is shown in paint."[23] Ochtman's *Early Winter*, c. 1900 (fig. 60), strikes a similar cord of veiled mystery, here in a sunset view in which every aspect of the landscape is blurred, edges softened, forms only hinted at, so that all elements of the composition are blended into one powerful image that triggers in the viewer a visceral response greater than the sum of its parts. Such soft-edged forms tend to the abstract and so move landscapes toward a more symbolic mode. J. Francis Murphy's *October Mist* (see fig. 35) demonstrates the suggestive power of the half-seen, showing how an array of soft-edged forms in a landscape can be wonderfully highlighted and invigorated by just a few hard-edged lines of darker pigment—in this case, the barest of broken jottings of trunks to invoke the presence of tree saplings emerging from the mist.

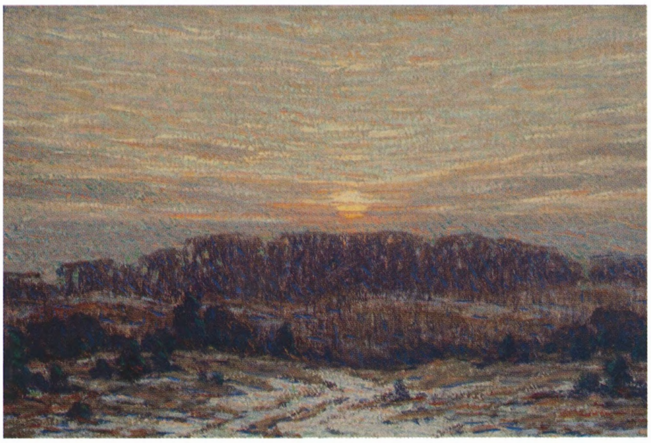


Fig. 60. Leonard Ochtman, *Early Winter*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 9 x 13 in. Private collection.

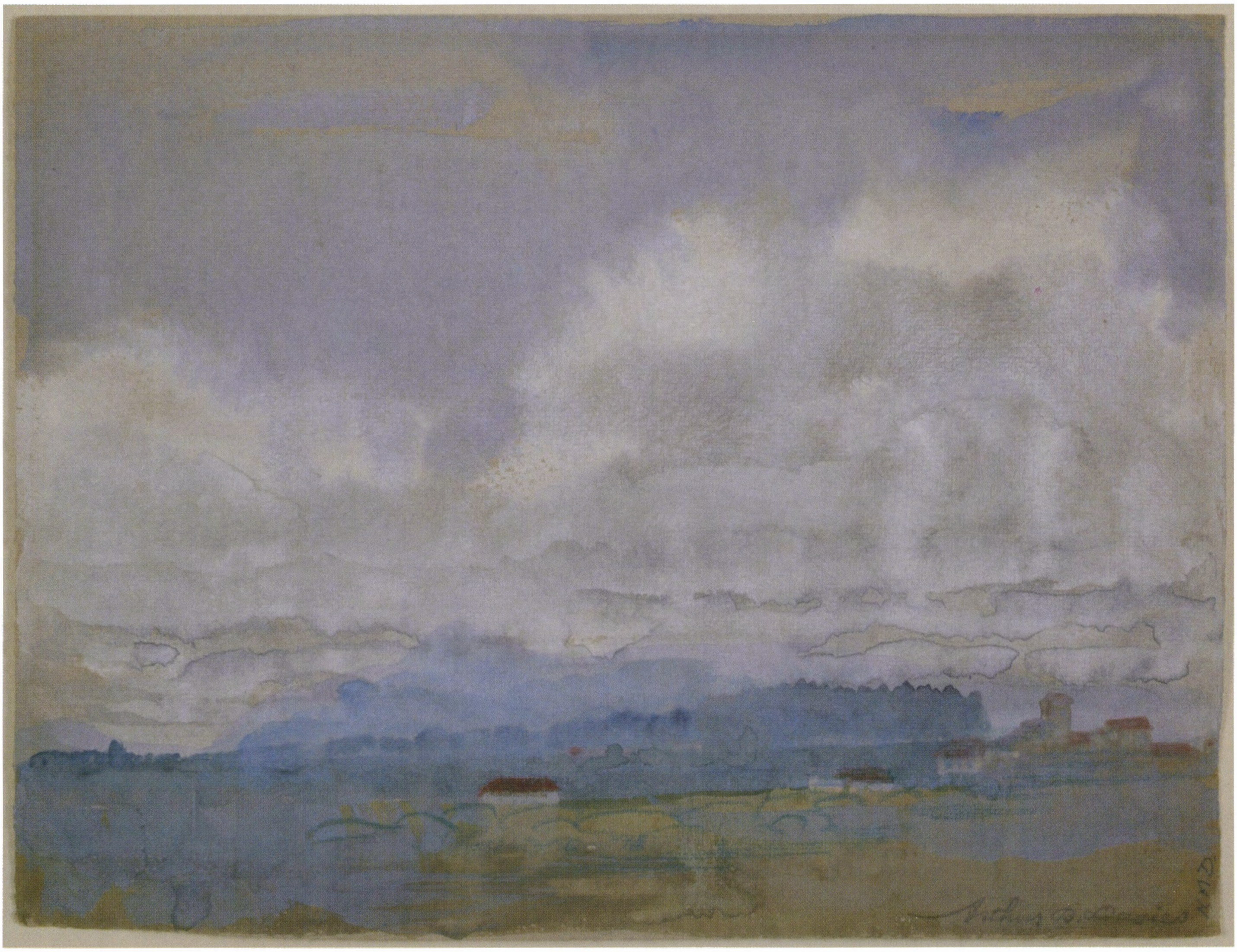


Fig. 61. Arthur Bowen Davies, *Misted Hills*, 1922. Watercolor, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

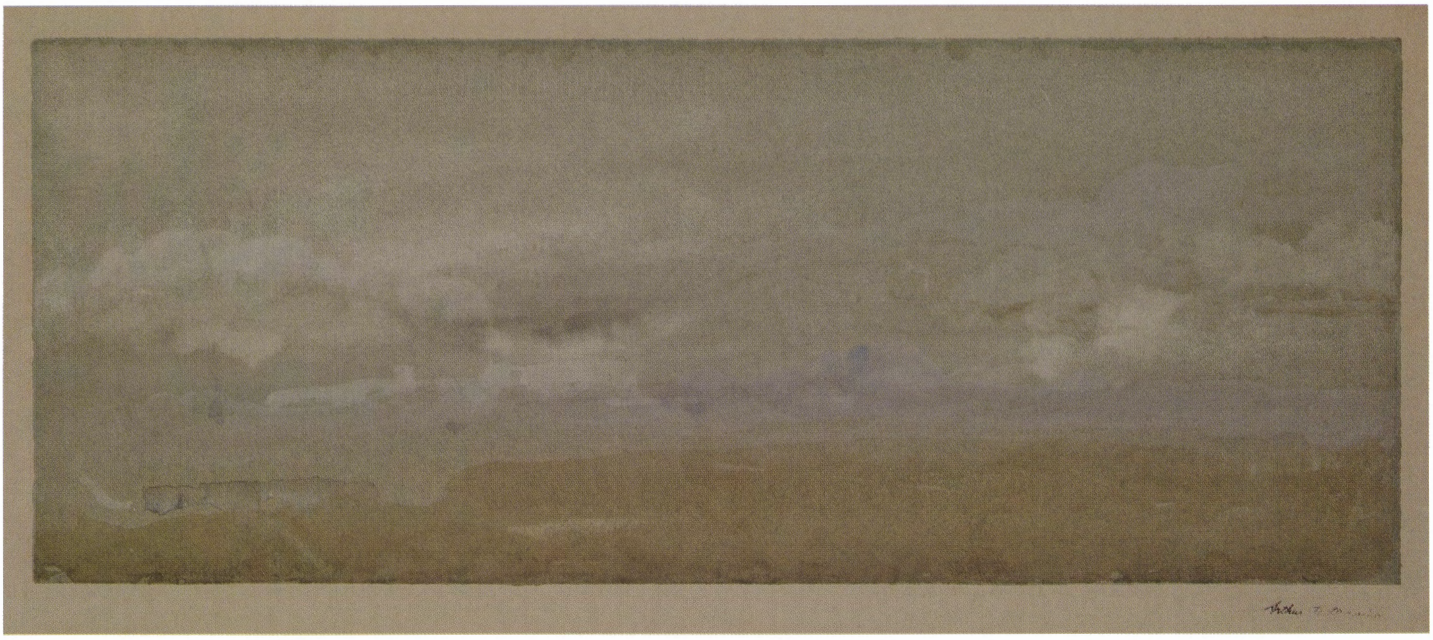


Fig. 62. Arthur Bowen Davies, *Cloudscape*, 1922. Watercolor, 9 x 24 in. Private collection.

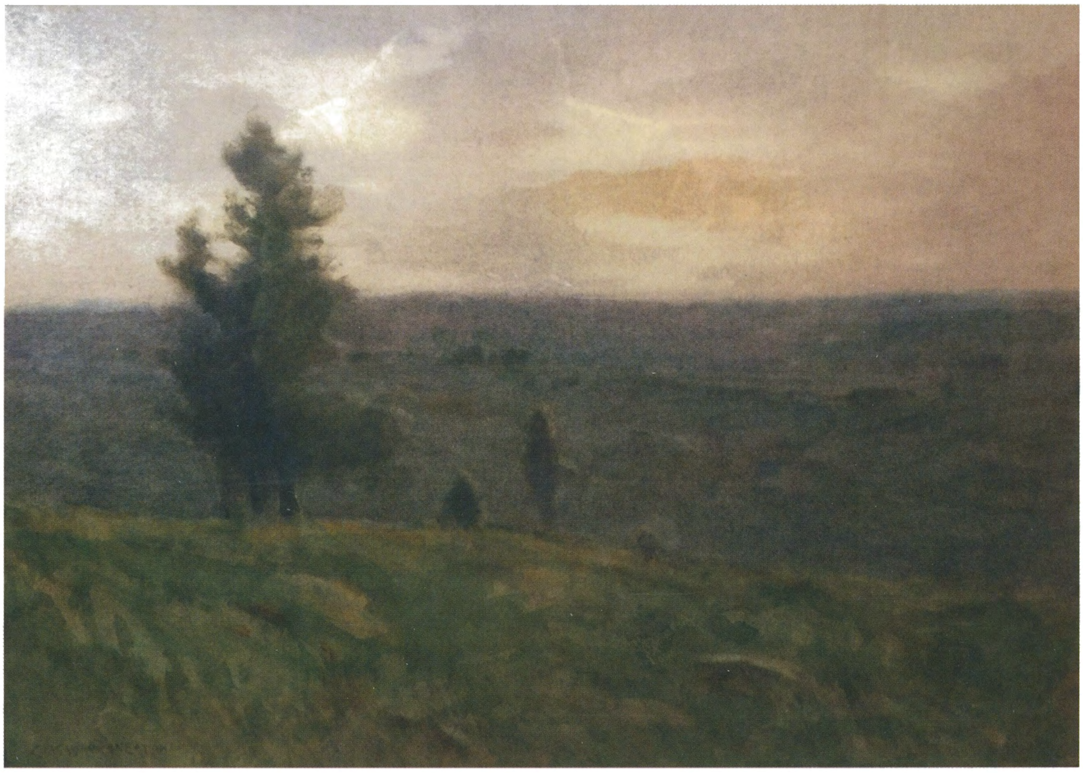


Fig. 63. Charles Warren Eaton, *Hillside Pines*, c. 1900. Watercolor, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

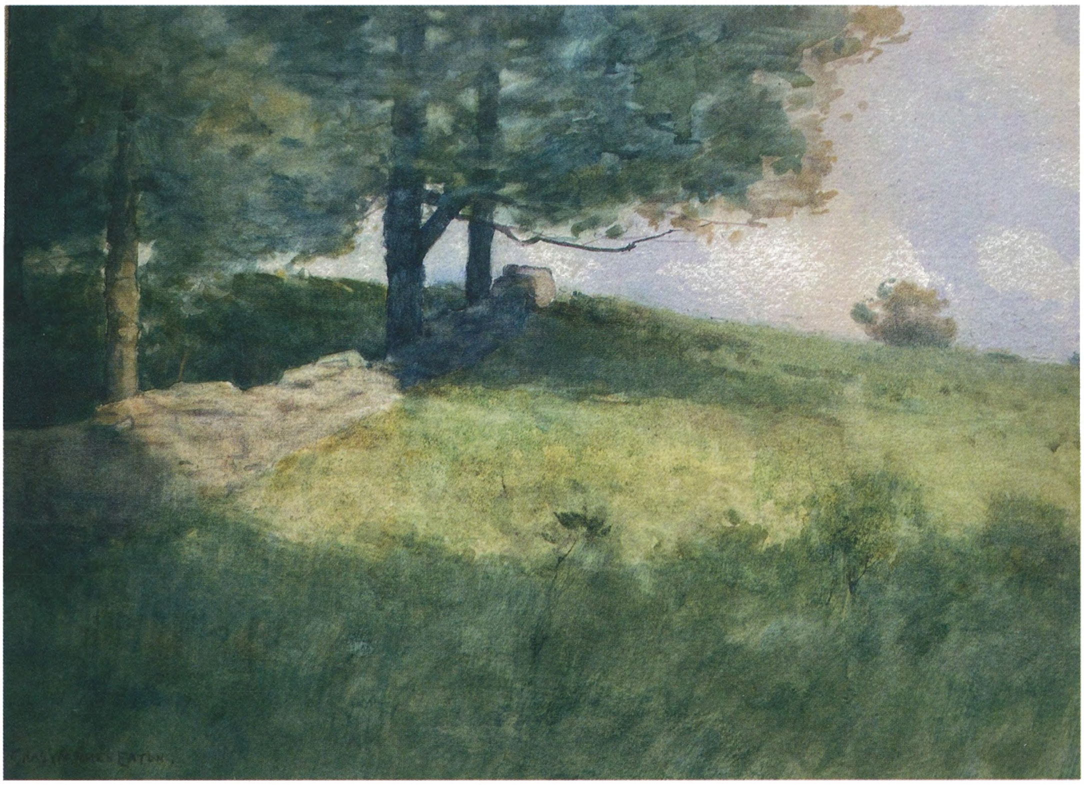


Fig. 64. Charles Warren Eaton, *Meadow Light*, c. 1900. Watercolor, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

Twilit Sky (see fig. 33), by Charles Warren Eaton, displays how such soft-edged forms, organized in a rectangular format, can be flattened to project a captivating two-dimensional world of floating, untethered bio-forms, which, perhaps conjured in homage to Albert Pinkham Ryder's dramatic cloud shapes, are avatars anticipating Rothko's soft-edged multiforms forty years later. An impulse to nearly complete abstraction inherent in the soft-edged Tonalist style—especially in the watercolor medium—is prefigured magnificently by Arthur Bowen Davies's late watercolors *Misted Hills* (fig. 61) and *Cloudscape*

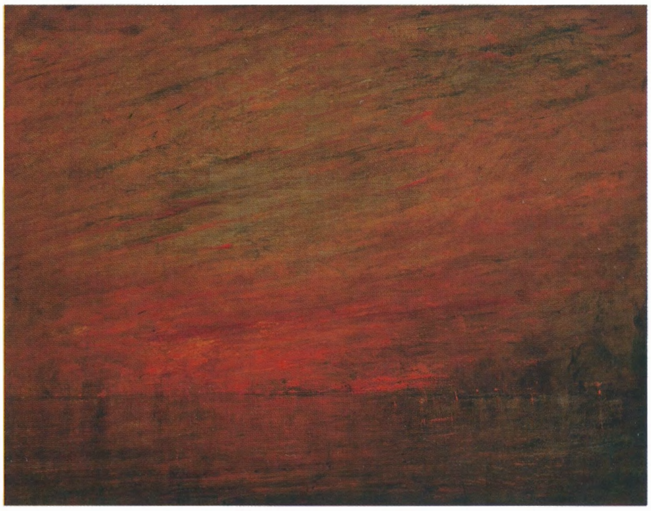


Fig. 65. William Gedney Bunce, *Venice Shimmer*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 in. Private collection.

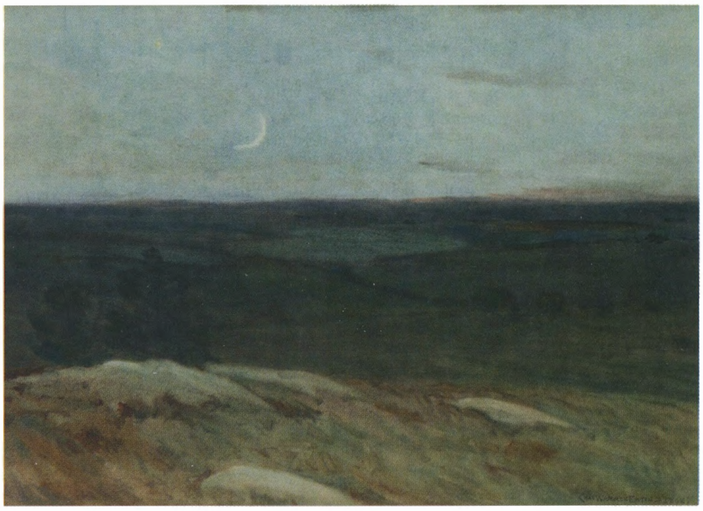


Fig. 66. Charles Warren Eaton, *Moonlit Lake*, 1898. Watercolor, 14 x 16 in. Private collection.

(fig. 62), both painted in 1922. Notice that in *Misted Hills*, Davies has allowed the watercolor medium to dry and create subtle hard-edged outlines in a few of the low-lying clouds to offer context for the eye and a contrast to the otherwise amorphous forms that predominate; in *Cloudscape*, conversely, there are almost no hard edges whatsoever, except at a few demarcation points of horizontal forms, where they hazily interact. Achieving an effective balance between soft- and hard-edged forms in a composition, especially in watercolor, required great skill and talent; too much one way or the other can lead to a work either vapid or stark and cold. Charles Warren Eaton's watercolors display a mastery of this subtle balance. The artist's *Hillside Pines*, c. 1900 (fig. 63), is a brilliant rendering composed almost entirely of soft-edged forms that allows just enough strategic definition—through the barest use of hard edges in the tree trunks, foreground boulders hidden by meadow grass, and background detailing—to give the composition substance and, more important, interest and wonder for the eye to leisurely decipher. Likewise, in *Meadow Light*, c. 1900 (fig. 64), Eaton achieves an intimate splendor with only the barest jotting of hard-edged definition in a single branch, while the high horizon and the grass-level perspective are both modernist elements that add a certain haunting ethereality—a treetop peeking over the horizon—and serenity to this quiet moment of lost time.

William Gedney Bunce's *Venice Shimmer*, 1912 (fig. 65), steers close to Davies's and Eaton's near total dematerialization of form in oil, here exemplified in the artist's relentless instinct to simplification and the dispensing with realistic hard-edged imagery of any kind, until his late lagoon pictures verge on imaginative mindscapes, if not forays into space and time and the untrammeled play of expressive color and light. In another day and date, this slashing expressionistic study in red and crimson might be compared to works by J. M. W. Turner or Rothko: a scrim of violent color belied by its soft edges that offers only the merest hint of a horizon line and a few hazy architectonic forms for safe anchorage. This is something, again, that Charles Warren Eaton approximated, even in his mid-career watercolors, such as *Moonlit Lake*, 1898 (fig. 66), where the far reaches of the landscape create hypnotic patterns that read as both flat soft-edged forms on the paper and recessional space fading into distance, here tethered by a quarter moon and the prominent boulders on the foreground hilltop. Nowhere has Eaton employed gouache, and even his crescent moon is deftly limned by the reserve of the paper. A similar feeling for the mystery of night and moonlight is echoed in Frederick Kost's *Nocturne, Staten Island*, c. 1895 (fig. 67), where the sea and sky enfold the hinted lights of shipping along the harbor quay. Kost deploys a magnificent array of free-flowing paint marks, merging and parting seamlessly to cast their spell upon the glittering moonlit waves.

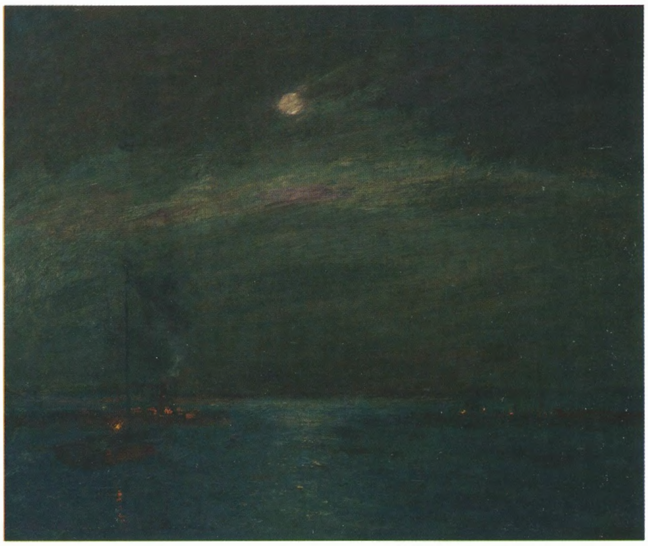


Fig. 67. Frederick Kost, *Nocturne, Staten Island*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in. Private collection.

9. An emphasis on the broad, graphic, ultimately abstract reading of the most important features in a composition, rendering an immediacy of emotional response—feeling—to the painting in its entirety, especially at a distance

Underlying all the technical and stylistic innovations of the Tonalist movement was an embrace of abstraction, first as a formal compositional mode, in Aesthetic Tonalism, and increasingly over time as a way of dramatizing the emotional impact of an artwork, prompted less by a progressive mantra than by a craftsman's logic to produce imagery that had immediate visceral impact. Feeling was the sine qua non of the Tonalist painter. An excerpt from Charles de Kay's 1905 *New York Times* review of an exhibition of works by Leonard Ochtman (see *Spirit of Fall*, fig. 17) illustrates how the most perceptive critic of his day reacted to Tonalism's inherently abstracting energies: "[Ochtman's painting] is a fine big tonal landscape with tender sky and a balanced composition, wedges of woodland to right and left. . . . [The work] makes one feel the movement of conversing fields of wheat and green pasture with the road in the valley told by rows of trees and by the moving hay cart, while in the central distance one foretells the turn of the valley by the lay of the land."[24] Ochtman's *Early Winter* (see fig. 60) is informed entirely by its soft-edged geometric design—in the wavelike horizontals of hills and radiant sky, deftly abstracted, which press upward and downward to demarcate the setting sun at the center, so focusing the eye on this muted orb—a compositional arrangement that appeals to both our imaginative embrace of the scene and the symbolic power of basic forms when enhanced by a structure of echoing patterns. Likewise,

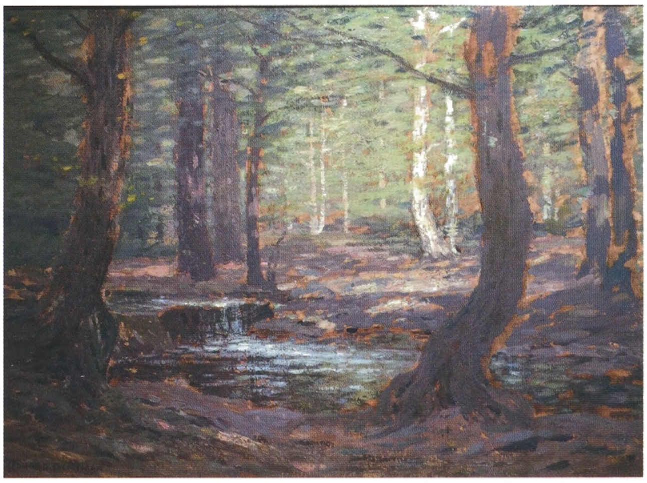


Fig. 68. Leonard Ochtman, *Woodland Stream*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 14 x 18 in. Private collection.

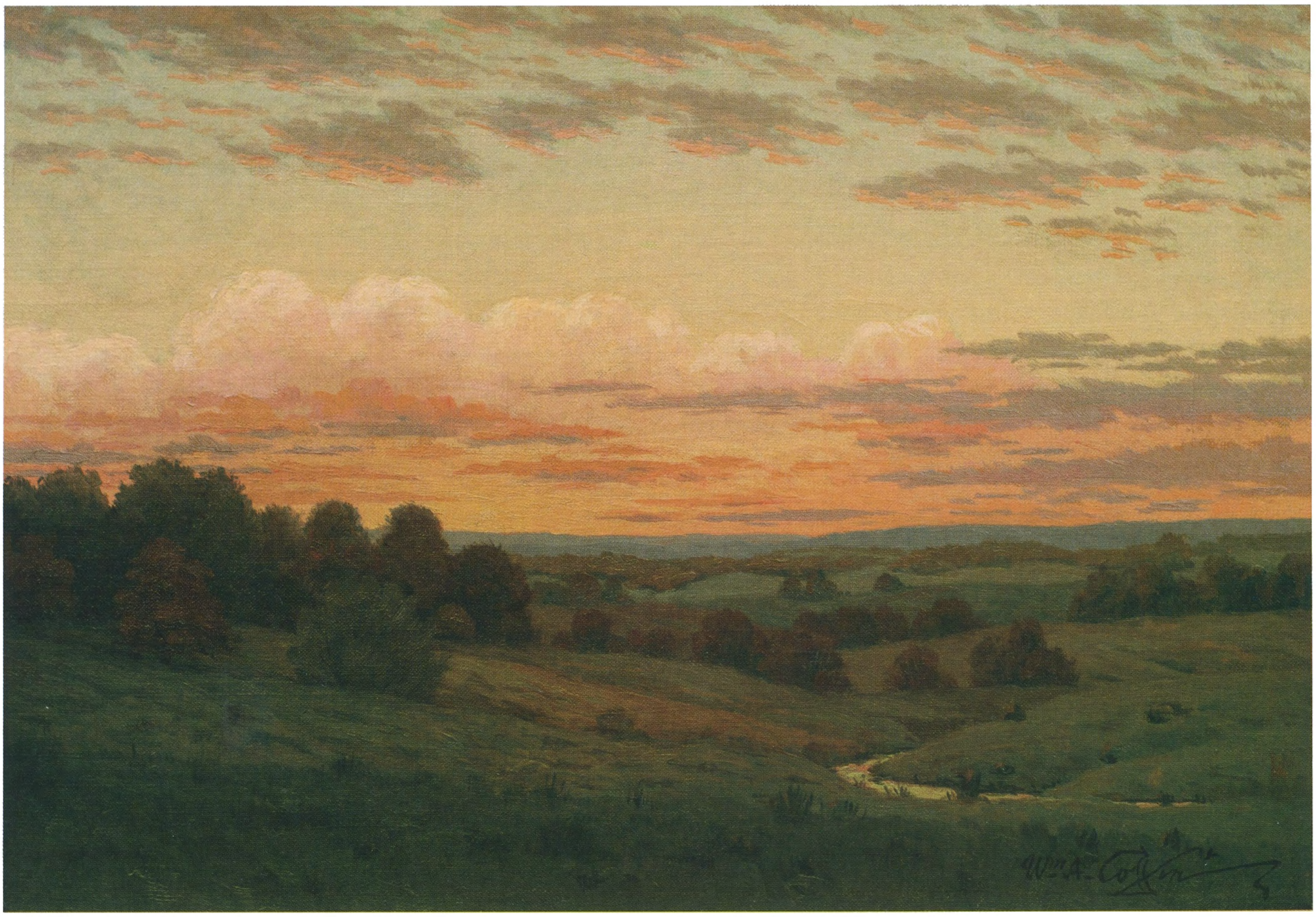


Fig. 69. William Anderson Coffin, *Sunset in October*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 14 x 20 in. Private collection.

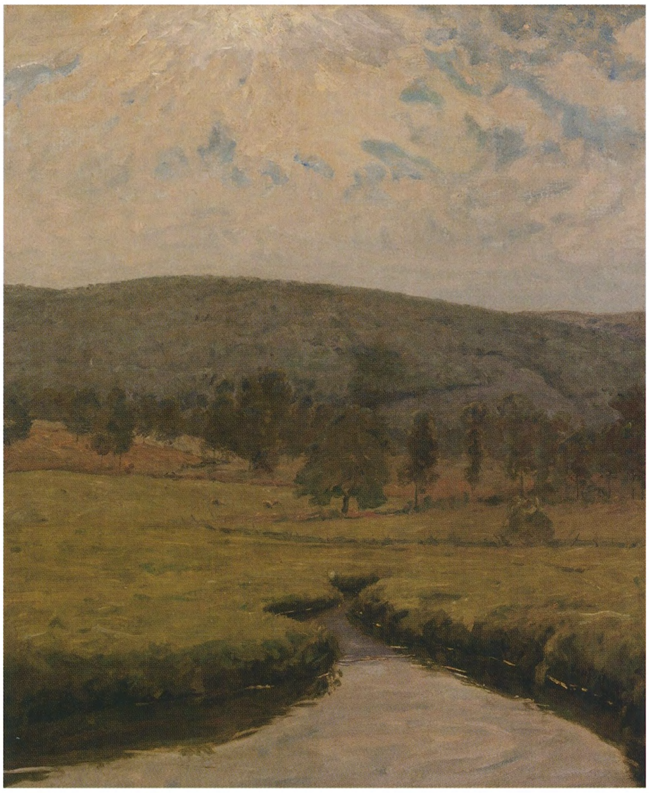


Fig. 70. Ben Foster, *Cornwall Stream*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in. Private collection.

Ochtman's *Woodland Stream*, 1910 (fig. 68), is simplicity itself, a cropped composition in which the rugged tree trunks receding into the understory stir the viewer's fancy with a kind of raw energy, as these forest beings, twisting and gyrating with a gestural amplitude, espouse a near anthropomorphic reading of the scene.

Sunset in October, c. 1900 (fig. 69), by William Anderson Coffin, delights in its formal abstraction of the horizontal elements in an otherwise traditional landscape setting. Emphasizing the cadence of tree and cloud forms and the interlocking intervals that contain them, Coffin leads the inveigled eye through the lush interior spaces of the painting and then outward into the stepping-stones of the cloud-strewn sky. The graphic strength of this composition has a visceral immediacy, as does the resultant feeling of equipoise and peace that the tight warp and woof of the structure imparts. Ben Foster's *Cornwall Stream*, 1905 (fig. 70), elicits a similar response, with the bold landforms describing the banks of a receding stream weaving its way into the distance, where it is flanked by lines of diagonally retreating trees. The scene is capped, in the beyond, by a slab of hills, over which a radiating diadem of clouds spills forth as if from some brilliant imperium. The large abstract landscape elements and their rhythmic play off one another provide the essential aesthetic drama of the work. *Naushon*, 1890 (fig. 71), by Robert Swain Gifford, is a tour de force of graphic simplicity and telling detail. The work has a

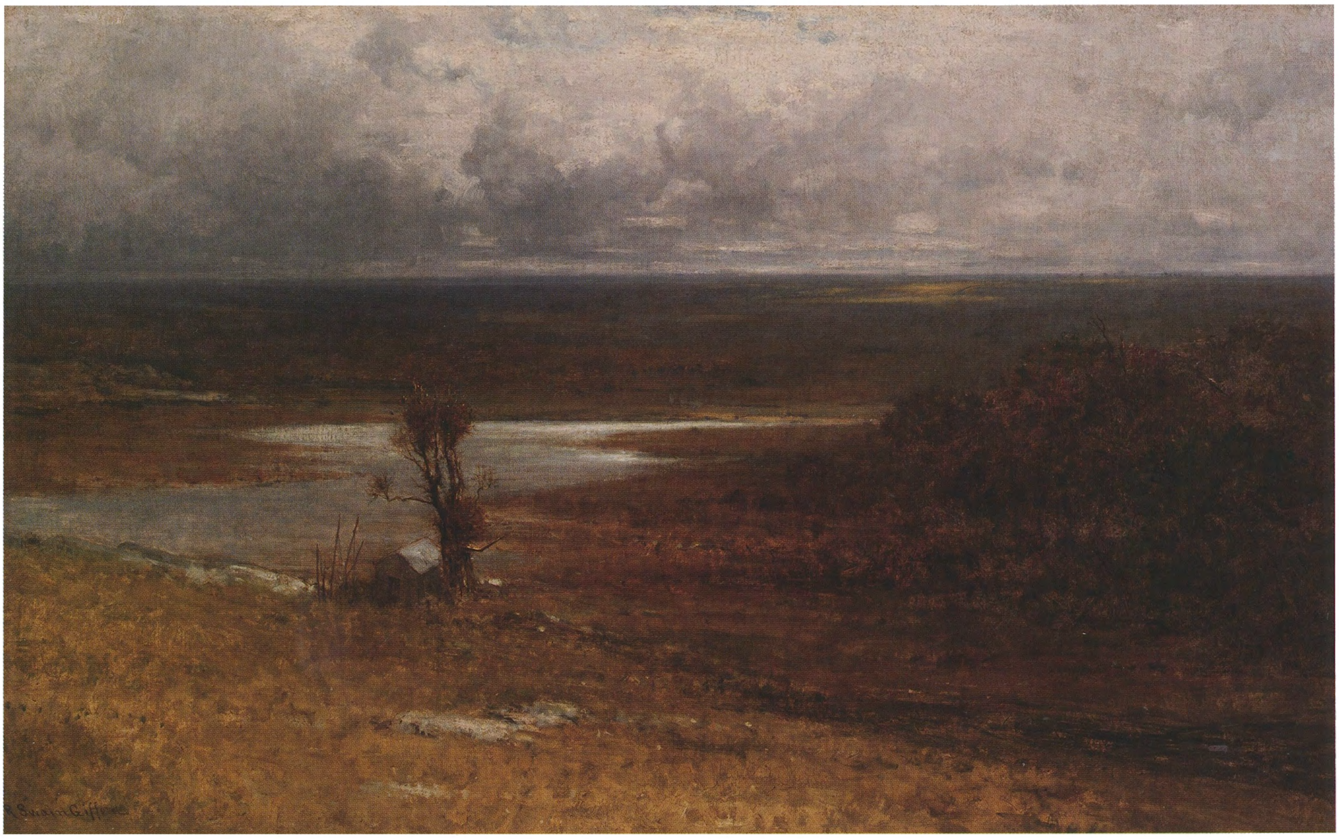


Fig. 71. Robert Swain Gifford, *Naushon*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 29 x 47 in. Private collection.

grandiosity of appeal, owing to the bold arrangement of its major landscape elements: a somber-hued foreground; a middle ground where the zigzag of a river or bay, glittering enticingly, merges to a hazy distance of open meadows; and capping all, a grandiloquent cloud-filled sky, soaring aloft. The imagery conveys both an immediacy and a deeper balm to the spirit, verging on a visionary experience in which the viewer is held spellbound, as if from a lonely mountain aerie. Only a small fisherman's hut in the middle ground offers a narrative point of interest, a momentary pause for the eye, a fetching detail that adds emphasis to the abstract hugeness of earth and sky. *White Pine* (see fig. 51), Emil Carlsen's vigorous, modernist rendition of the barest essentials—cropped vertical tree trunks in a glade of pines—exemplifies the formal abstracting power gained by such a severe and minimalist depiction of the quotidian. The near complete abstraction of *Blue Distance* (see fig. 37), by Arthur Bowen Davies, demonstrates as well how the inherent drive for abstraction among the Tonalists resulted in increasing simplification and more powerful imagery, and the creation of compositions that project deeper feeling while laying the groundwork for the modernist mantra "less is more."

10. Emphasis on the elegiac poetry of landscape, reflecting the trauma of the Civil War

If there is a predominant emotional charge underlying the Tonalist style—nostalgia, reverie, melancholy, joyous recollection in times of sweet repose—it most likely reflects the deep trauma of the Civil War and the relentless changes brought about by rapid industrialization and urban growth that would affect American society in the ensuing decades. Such feelings of loss, dislocation, nostalgic longing for a bygone, more peaceful world are best expressed in a fundamentally nonnarrative art that relies on poetry, metaphor, and nonspecific allusion to provide solace for a traumatized nation. Thus Tonalism's prime emphasis was on landscape, especially depictions of the intimate near-at-home farmlands and rural oases—often at dusk or dawn—evoking the once-upon-a-time presence of human habitation: abandoned fields, tumbled fieldstone walls, old roads, and second-growth forests. (In the architectural realm, many of these same impulses can be discerned in the intimate tree-lined city parks developed by Frederick Law Olmsted in this period, and in the domestic architecture of Henry Richardson in the 1880s, as he moved away from the busy picturesque and polychromatic facades of his early work to facings of monochromatic ashlar granite without contrasting trim. Richardson's horizontally accented structures, with their aura of order and repose, achieve a degree of serenity or, as he expressed it, "simplicity and quietness." This ideal of simplicity was extended and deepened in the Prairie-style houses of Frank Lloyd Wright, in which he combined Richardson's emphasis on the tripartite horizontal with a sense of the organic, including the use of geometrically altered natural forms as decorative additions, along with art-glass windows and ornamental friezes. Wright sought a poetical equivalence to the outdoors in his domestic architecture, what he described as "conventionalization" of nature, so evoking the harmony, repose, and sense of safe retreat afforded by the intimacies of the civilized landscape.)

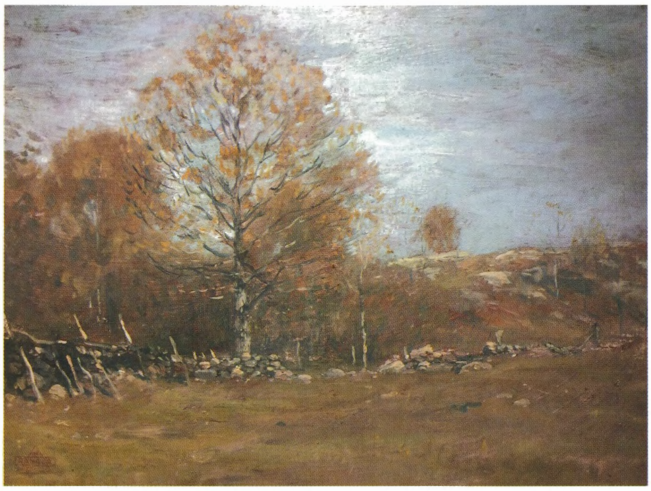


Fig. 72. Henry Ward Ranger, *Early Spring*, 1910. Oil on panel, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

The absence of figures in the Tonalist landscape is almost universal, while the remnants of human presence cheek-by-jowl with the wild is a ubiquitous iconology. Tonalism's elegiac quality, a kind of quietist soothing poetry, was remarked on like a mantra in period texts, here by Charles de Kay in his *New York Times* review of a Leonard Ochtman exhibition at the MacBeth Gallery in 1898 (see Ochtman's *Greenwich*, *Fall Meadow*, *Spirit of Fall*, and *Early Winter*, figs. 4, 5, 17, and 60, respectively): "Tender sentiment for and sympathy with nature's softer moods are the features of Mr. Ochtman's work, and, whether he paints the flush of dawn, the dreamy noon hour of a still Summer day, the rosy tints of sunset, or the misty, weird atmosphere of a Summer moonlit night, he is in tune with that side of nature which only a poet artist can adequately portray."[25] Tonalist Henry Ward Ranger wrote explicitly of his nostalgia for his favorite painting grounds in and around Mystic, Connecticut, where he was drawn to deserted homesteads and farms abandoned by inhabitants heading for the West, which he contrasted with memories of Europe, where most of the land was still under active cultivation: "But in New England, the country lanes are full of brush and grass and flowering weeds, with the little-used wagon track zigzagging between tumbled-down stone walls and rickety rail fences. I never get into a farmer's back-fields with their ridges of rock, recurringly stripped of timber, without feeling what a race of unconscious heroes the pioneers must have been. . . . I think of their innumerable hardships, of their fierce battles, and am amazed at their invincible courage. . . . I am filled with reverence and wonder."[26] Ranger's

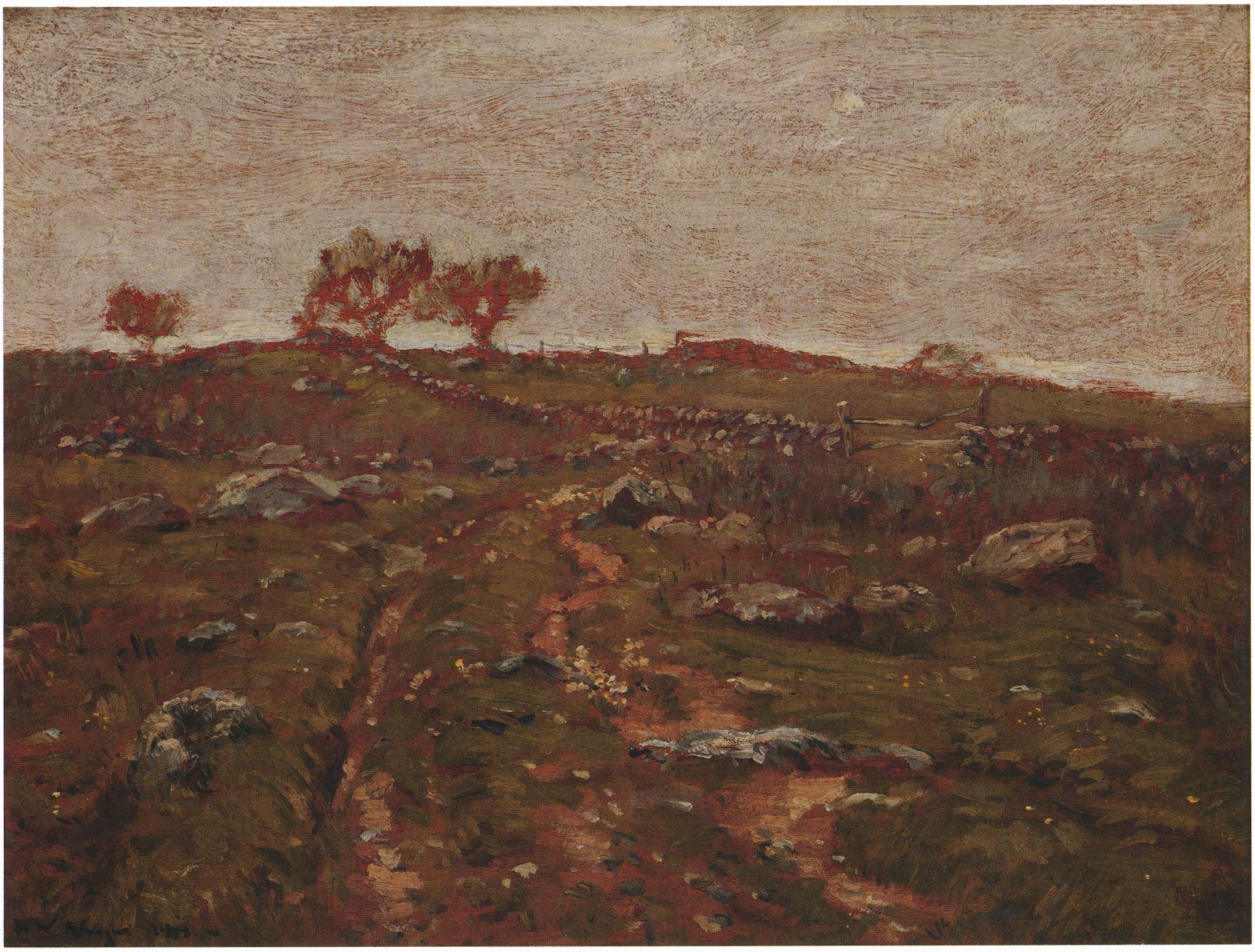


Fig. 73. Henry Ward Ranger, *Hillside Trees*, 1905. Oil on panel, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

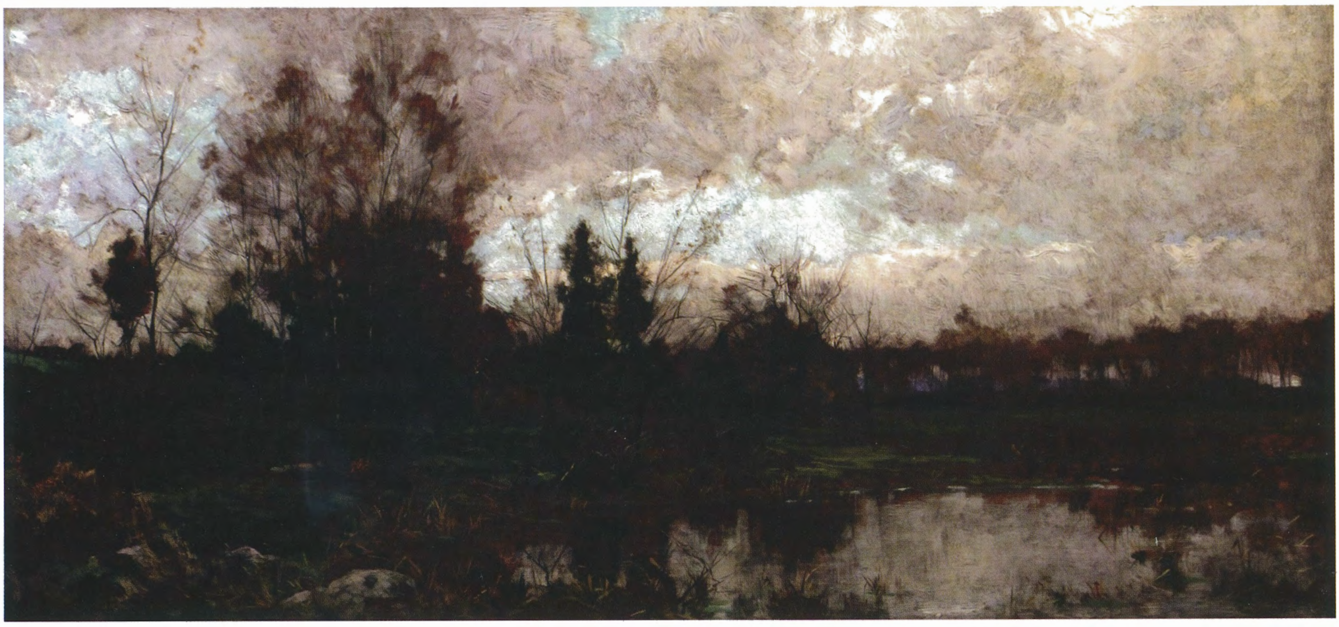


Fig. 74. Hugh Bolton Jones, *Autumn*, 1889. Oil on panel, 15 x 32 in. Private collection.

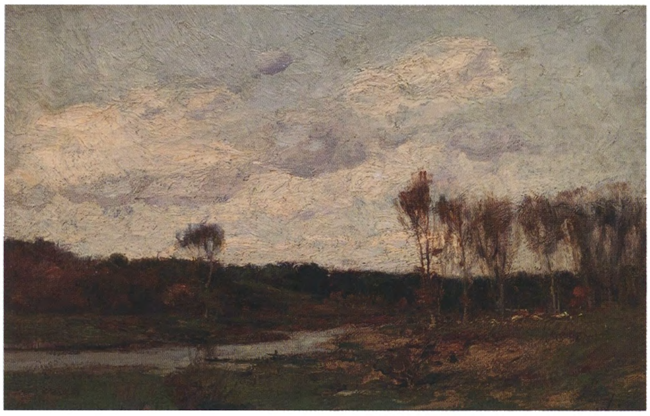


Fig. 75. Franklin De Haven, *Spring Hues*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 10 x 16 in. Private collection.

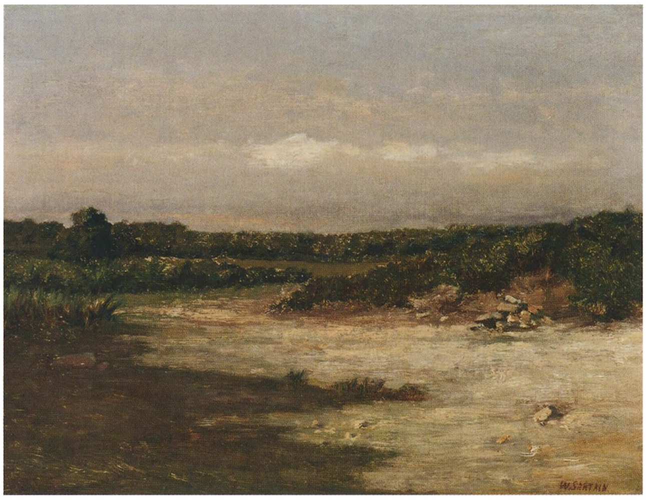


Fig. 77. William Sartain, *Nonquit*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

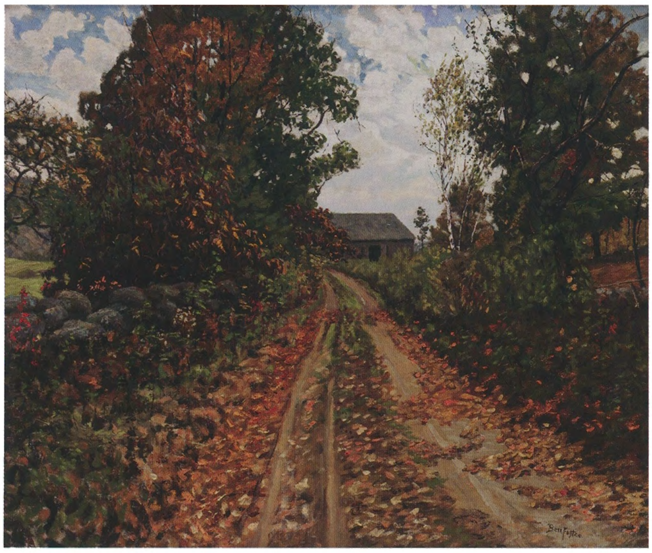


Fig. 76. Ben Foster, *Autumn Road*, c. 1915. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. Private collection.

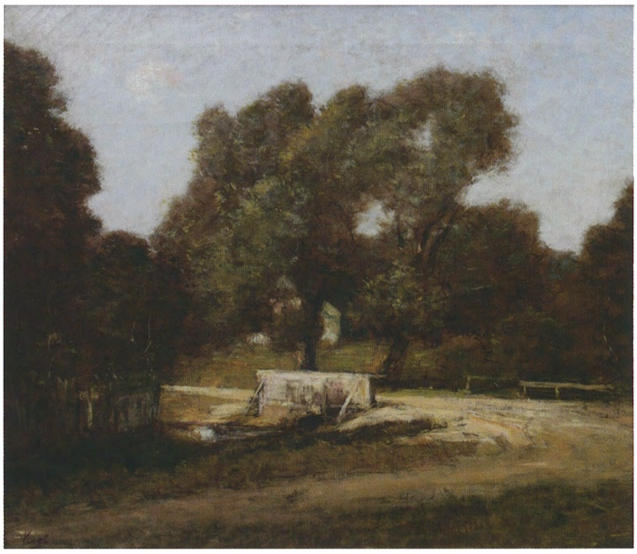


Fig. 78. Frederick Kost, *Summer Shadows*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in. Private collection.

Early Spring, 1910 (fig. 72), perfectly illustrates the artist's vision of an abandoned New England pasture with the ruins of a fieldstone wall and the remnants of a split-rail fence that speak to the endless labors of the early inhabitants—a vision that is enhanced by the quality of thin-misted sunlight the artist has uncannily captured that is so distinctive of New England's grudging springs. The artist's *Hillside Trees*, 1905 (fig. 73), pays homage to another hardscrabble farm of stone walls and granite outcroppings, where an old cart track meanders upward in the direction of what appears to be the remnants of an apple orchard on the crest of the rocky hill. Ranger's brilliant use of the cinnamon-colored support, which he allows to bleed through the pigment, deftly deployed in defining the trees on the horizon, is a technique derived from Whistler; it gives the image a warm glow and a unified tonality that only enhances the sense of nostalgia such scenes invoked for the generations between the Civil War and World War I.

The intimate character of Aesthetic Tonalism in the 1880s and '90s was particularly suited to evoking such postbellum feelings of poignant loss and hope of renewal; and one suspects that the memories embodied in these landscapes offered much consolation for period collectors. *Autumn*, 1889 (fig. 74), Hugh Bolton Jones's paean to the fall season, perfectly embodies the sense of brooding melancholy that touched many in these decades, in the artful deployment of landscape elements over a narrow horizontal space. The exquisite balance of soft- and hard-edged forms, the haunting russet tones, and an overarching somber atmosphere culminate in a near-iconic image of loss and renewal. Franklin De Haven's lush *Spring Hues*, 1888 (fig. 75), too provides a contemplative subject. The detailed foreground shaped by the course of a lazy stream firmly anchors the gaze, while the soft-edged, hazily shaped trees move in shimmering whispers under the white banners of passing clouds. Such a familiar ensemble touches on the ever-present yearning for

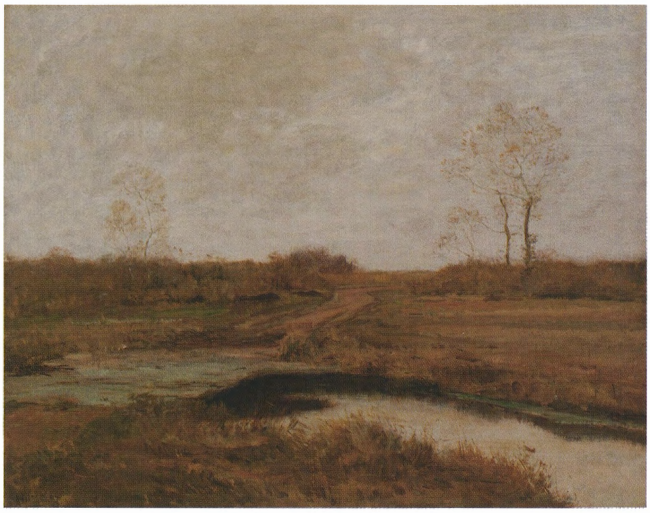


Fig. 79. Frederick Kost, *Southfield Marshes, Staten Island*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in. Private collection.

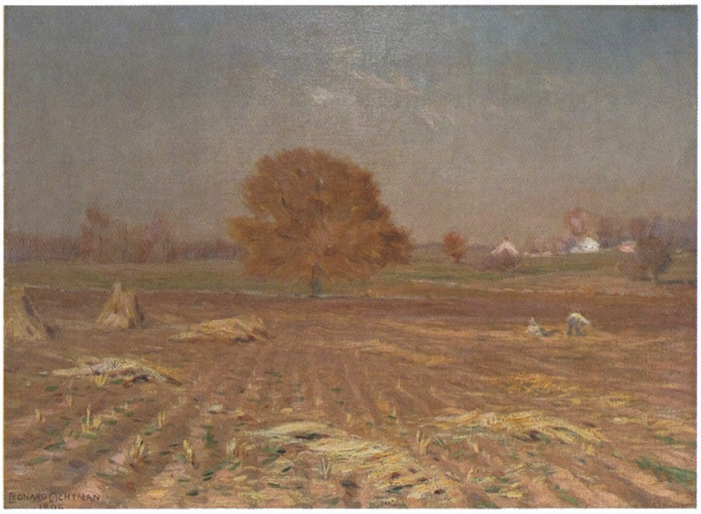


Fig. 81. Leonard Ochtman, *Harvest*, 1896. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

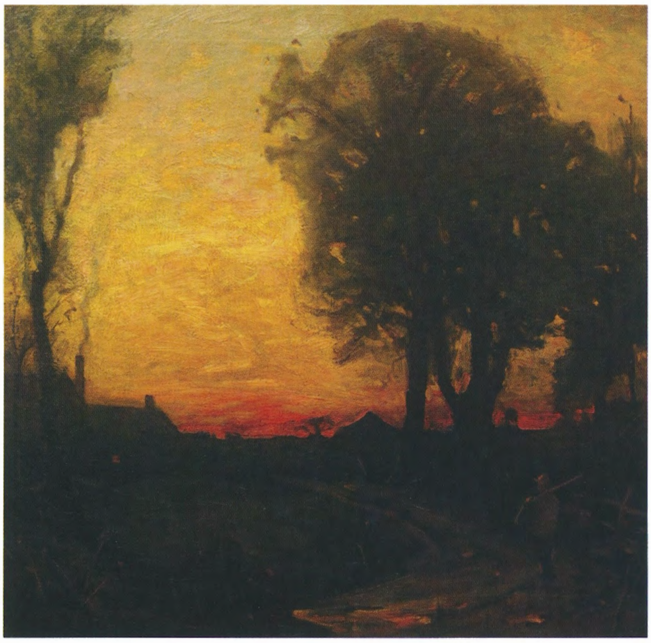


Fig. 80. Charles Melville Dewey, *Sunset*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in. Private collection.

spring's coming. While the sentinel boughs of Charles Warren Eaton's *Forest Edge* (see fig. 22) appeal to a very different mood, the image to period eyes might well have evoked tattered battle flags or nature's immemorial vigil upon the horrific slaughter that took place on Pennsylvanian fields just thirty-five years before. Perhaps, too, in the timbered hills around Thompson, Connecticut, where the artist worked in summer, Eaton evokes a long-ago slaughter of a different kind, and the slow renewal of the forests, year by year, as second-growth white pine returned to those abandoned farm fields. Such losses could also be expressed in more traditional fare, such as Ben Foster's *Autumn Road*, c. 1915 (fig. 76), where the artist's lush brushwork speaks to the simple beauty of fall and a season of thanksgiving. Such scenes acknowledge the desire for a more ordered and peaceful world and pay homage to the hundreds of thousands who never returned home to the family farm and the many others who moved westward for better prospects.

Even a spare shore scene like William Sartain's *Nonquit*, 1910 (fig. 77), touches on an unrequited melancholy in the bare-bones arrangements of interlocking land forms veiled in patterns of shadow and light, presenting a timeless sounding of memory, of the subjective intermingling of time present and past in the incandescent moment. Such fleeting Proustian visions, when memory is triggered by vague recollections of a time out of mind, cast a mesmerizing spell over the most ordinary events and places, such as the turning of an empty road in Frederick Kost's *Summer Shadows*, c. 1910 (fig. 78), or his equally haunting *Southfield Marshes, Staten Island*, c. 1895 (fig. 79), in both of which, mystery and solitude are invoked by the unremarkable, the perfectly quotidian—two bridges empty of foot traffic—so abandoning viewers to their own remembrance of things past. And in one of the very few Tonalist works that includes a figure, Charles Melville Dewey's *Sunset*, c. 1900 (fig. 80), we see an iconic image of a returning soldier approaching the old homestead (here in the guise of a farmer returning from his fields, hoe slung over his shoulder), gazing upon the glory of a sunset, reminder of day's end and labors done and the quiet joys to be found in the enduring certainties of hearth and home—and hopes for a nation at peace. Such hopes are equally apparent in Leonard Ochtman's *Harvest*, 1896 (fig. 81), a bucolic setting, hazy with grain dust and early fall light, which to period eyes would most likely invoke a sense of well-being and normalcy after the bloodletting of so recent memory. The atmospheric envelope much beloved by the Tonalists is so pronounced that even to contemporary eyes the scene seems to be preserved in some timeless essence, perhaps a memorial to our better angels.

11. A spiritual dimension: the portrayal of a mystical organic relationship between perceiver and the perceived (the Transcendentalist radical subjectivity espoused by Emerson and Thoreau)

Hand in hand with the elegiac poetry of Tonalism, a style that provided consolation in the face of the unimaginable horror of the Civil War, is the fundamentally spiritual dimension of Tonalism that offered a bereft nation a new focus for religiosity in all its many turn-of-the-century guises, from Unitarianism and Spiritualism to Swedenborgianism, Transcendentalism, Buddhism, and various forms of Eastern mysticism, not to mention the first stirrings of environmentalism. For many collectors of the day, a Tonalist landscape hanging on the parlor wall offered the same kind of grace and solace as an image of a Madonna and Child would for a Catholic. The lack of human imagery or explicit narrative fitted with the more purely spiritual impulses of a more austere Protestantism in its Unitarian guise, while adhering to the uplifting voice found in the writings of Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau, which became widely read and absorbed by the cultivated public

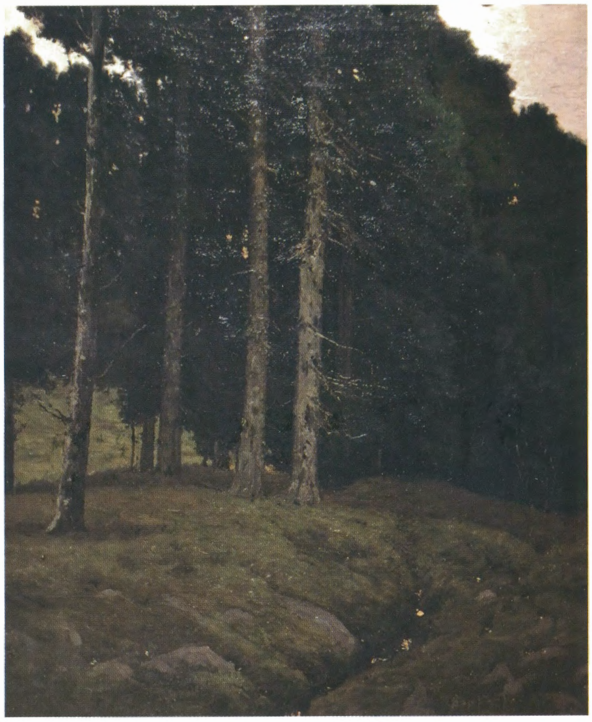


Fig. 83. Ben Foster, *Silent Pines*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in. Private collection.

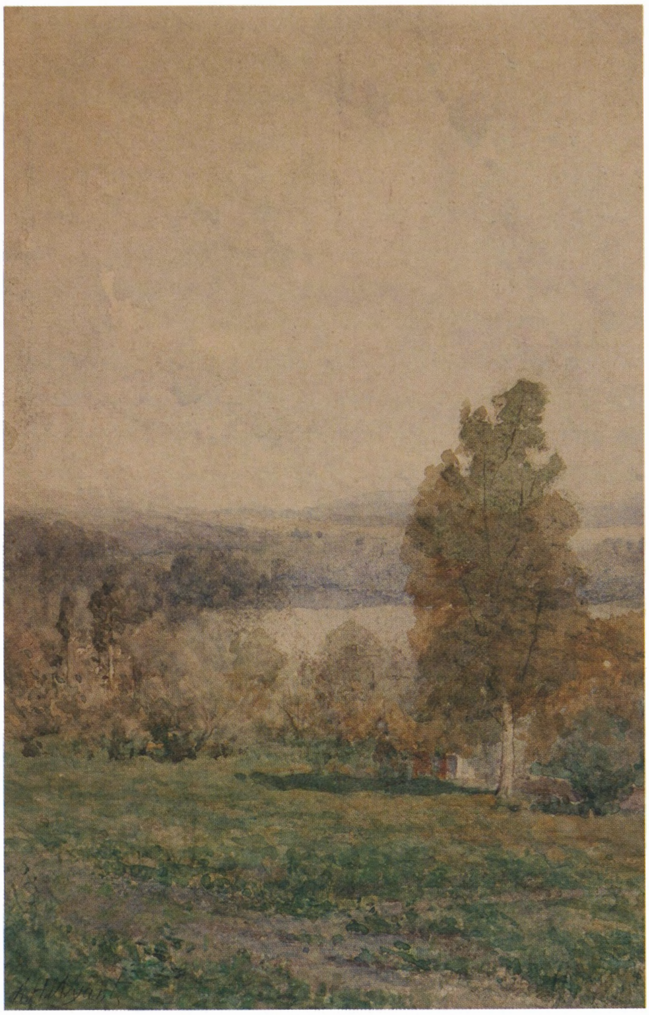


Fig. 82. Alexander Wyant, *Catskills*, c. 1910. Watercolor, 10 x 6 in. Private collection.

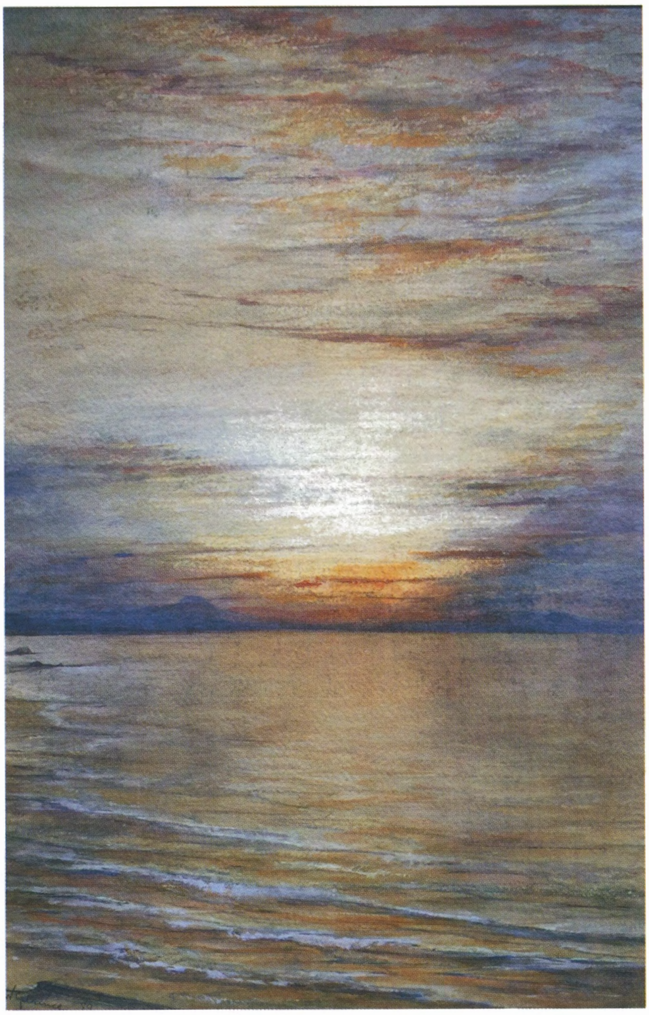


Fig. 84. William Gedney Bunce, *Sunset off the Spanish Coast*, 1889. Watercolor, 19 x 12 in. Private collection.

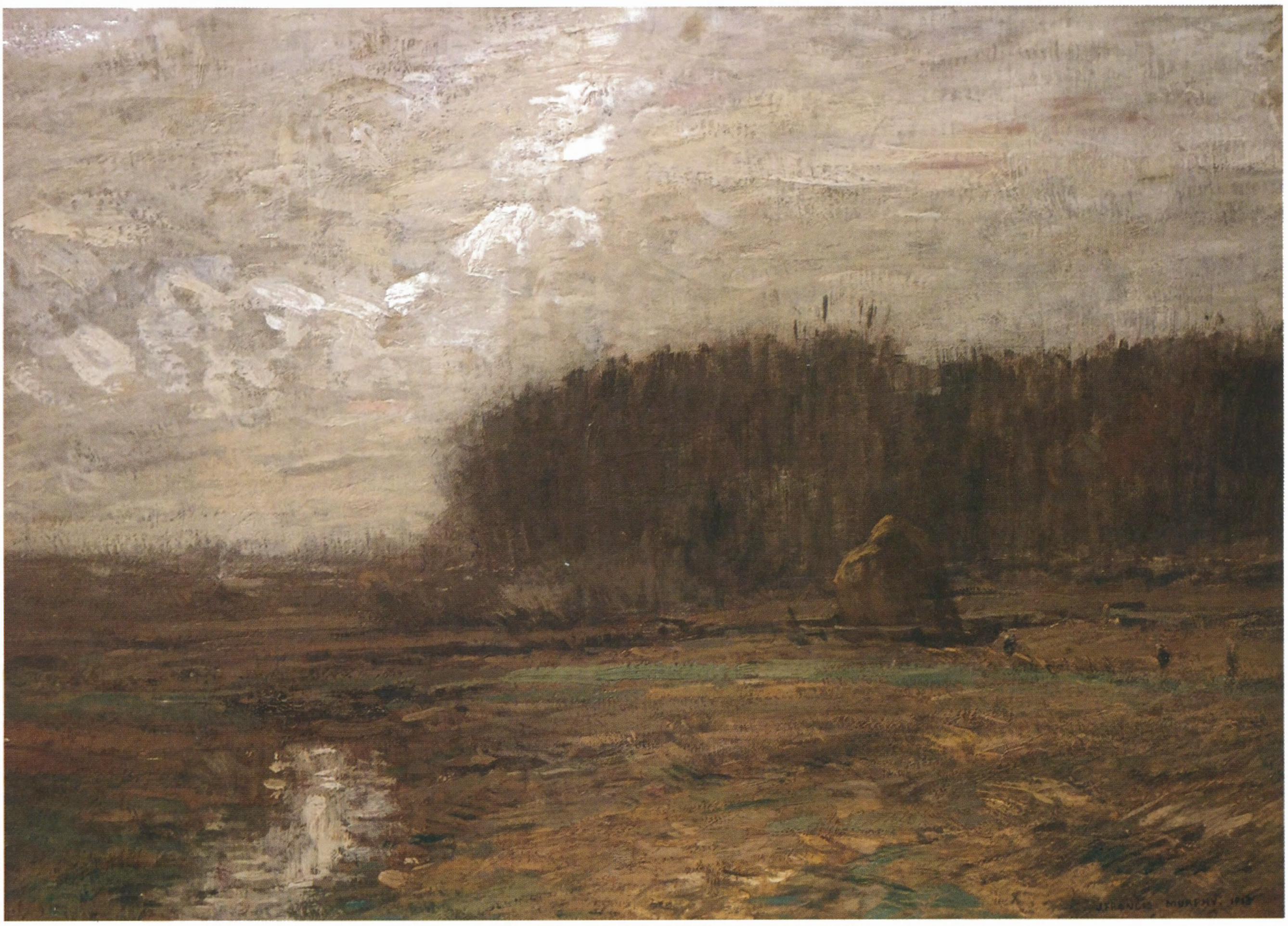


Fig. 85. J. Francis Murphy, *A November Morning*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

precisely in the years that saw the emergence and flourishing of the Tonalist movement, as it replaced the more bombastic literalism of the Hudson River School, a style that had extolled the somewhat tarnished glories of postbellum America. Emerson's writings, abetted by Thoreau's more earthy reflections, awakened a taste for a radical subjectivity in their readers. This generalized Transcendentalist idealism spoke of a mind common to all men and women, of an abiding relationship between humans and nature that was embedded in our very humanness; or, as Emerson put it: "It is the constant endeavor of the mind to idealize the actual, to accommodate the shows of things to the desires of the mind." Such language spoke deeply to a postbellum generation seeking solace in a more intimate and abiding relationship to the natural world. "The remedy for all abuses, all error in thought or practice," Emerson wrote, "is the conviction that underneath all appearances and causing all appearances are certain eternal laws which we call the Nature of Things."[27]

Such currents of thought fed various streams of a more radically subjective, mystical, and organic spirituality invested in the comforting values of home ground, and in turn infused Tonalism with powerful yet subtle imagery that mirrored the psychic yearnings of the individual and the nation. In his essay "Religion," Emerson had described this need as a yearning for poetic moments, when "this deep power in which we lie and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object are one."[28] This radical subjectivity, or reciprocity between the perceiver and the perceived, is deeply embedded in Tonalism's most profound imagery. The artist Alexander Wyant, who in his early career could portray the wilderness with soaring passion, could as well in his later, more personal watercolors, such as *Catskills*, c. 1910 (fig. 82), describe a bucolic scene of repose: a pathway, a view, a captured moment in transparent washes that stirs an abiding sense of belonging. The brooding soulfulness of Ben Foster's *Silent Pines*, c. 1910 (fig. 83), is a moving example of the period taste for subjects that to a modern eye might seem dark and dreary but that in our great-grandparents touched something deeply rooted. Foster's imagery is not just conducive to meditation; the artist's crepuscular tones beg repeated and close viewings, so allowing for the telling details to fully reveal themselves: here in the glints of light between the pines and reflected in the trickle of a stream, there in the delicate subtleties of various greens within the darker masses of the pines, which—as the eye adjusts—reveal the shapes of the

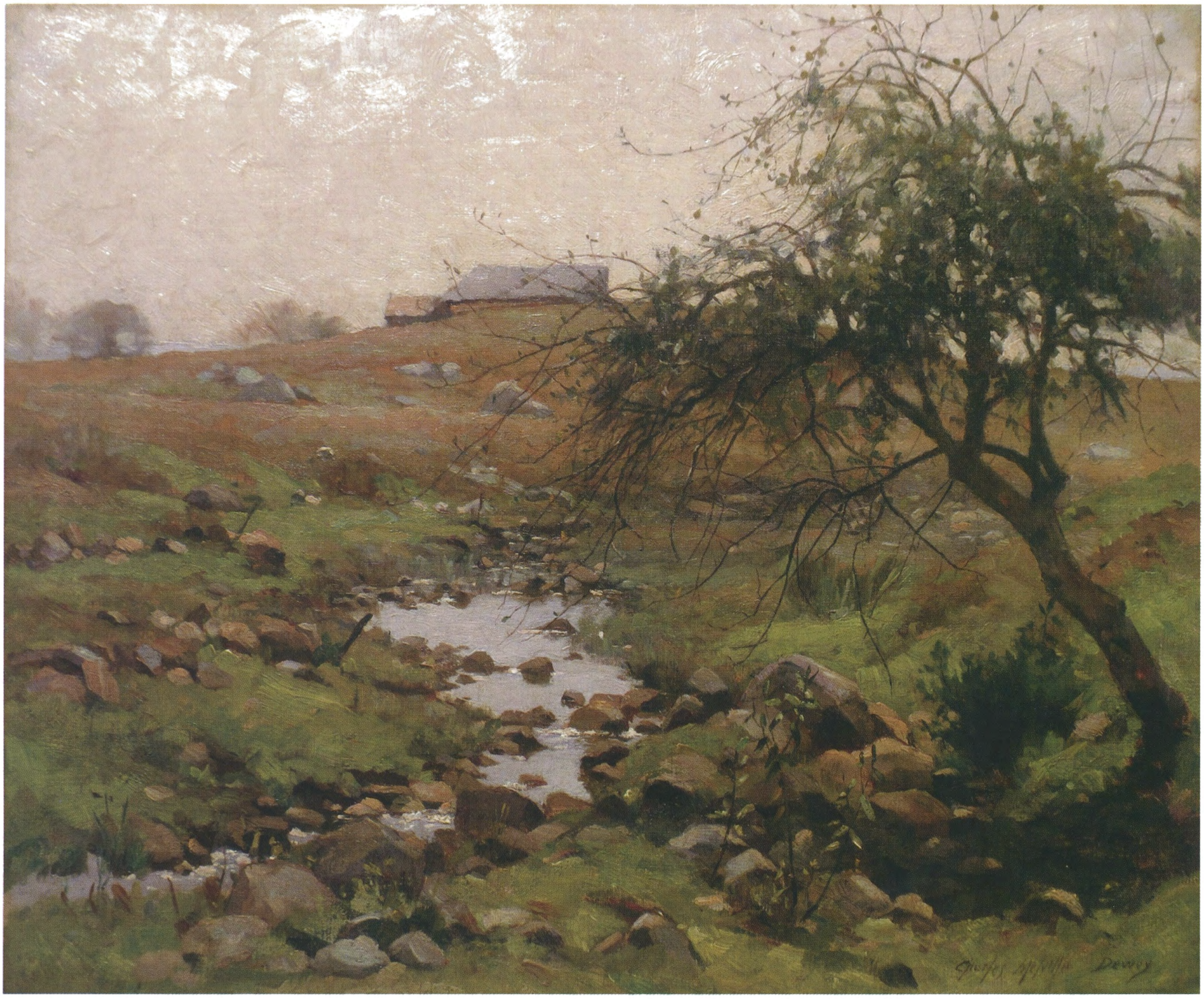


Fig. 86. Charles Melville Dewey, *Misty Morning*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 18 x 22 in. Private collection.

interior branches. One can only marvel, in a day before electric lighting, that such dark pictures could nevertheless attract buyers who found them intensely moving. More easily grasped is William Gedney Bunce's *Sunset off the Spanish Coast*, 1889 (fig. 84), which offers a spacious vision of endless clouds and seas that touches on the sublime, sparking a sense of awe and wonder that such vast prospects awaken in the human heart. J. Francis Murphy's *A November Morning*, 1913 (fig. 85),[29] with its melancholy russet tonality, would have resonated deeply for collectors still close to their agricultural roots, less as a harvest scene per se (a mowed meadow, haystack, and backdrop of shorn trees) and more for the delicate depiction of seasonal light, a glow of muted tones at once descriptive of the visible world but also a harbinger of autumn's ineffable moods—an atmosphere infused with feeling and so expressive of time's passing and days gathered in, if not the weary prospect of a long hard winter still to come.

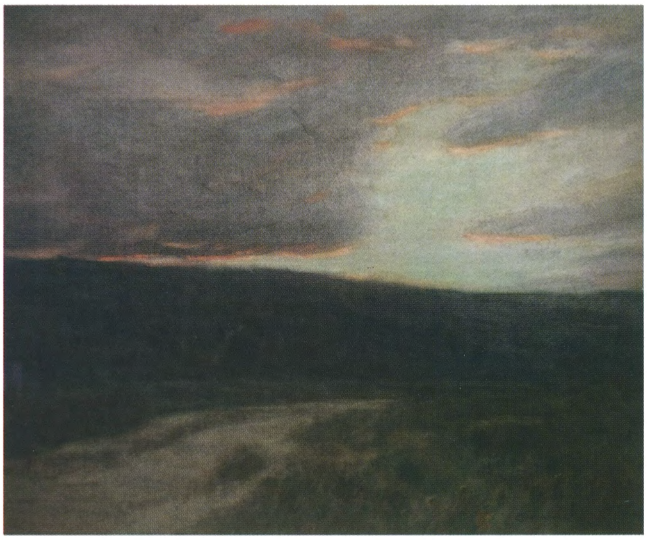


Fig. 87. Charles Warren Eaton, *Catskill Sunset*, 1905. Watercolor, 14 x 18 in. Private collection.

Such Tonalist landscapes offered both solace and a meditative grace. The artworks' circumscribed range of imagery, of

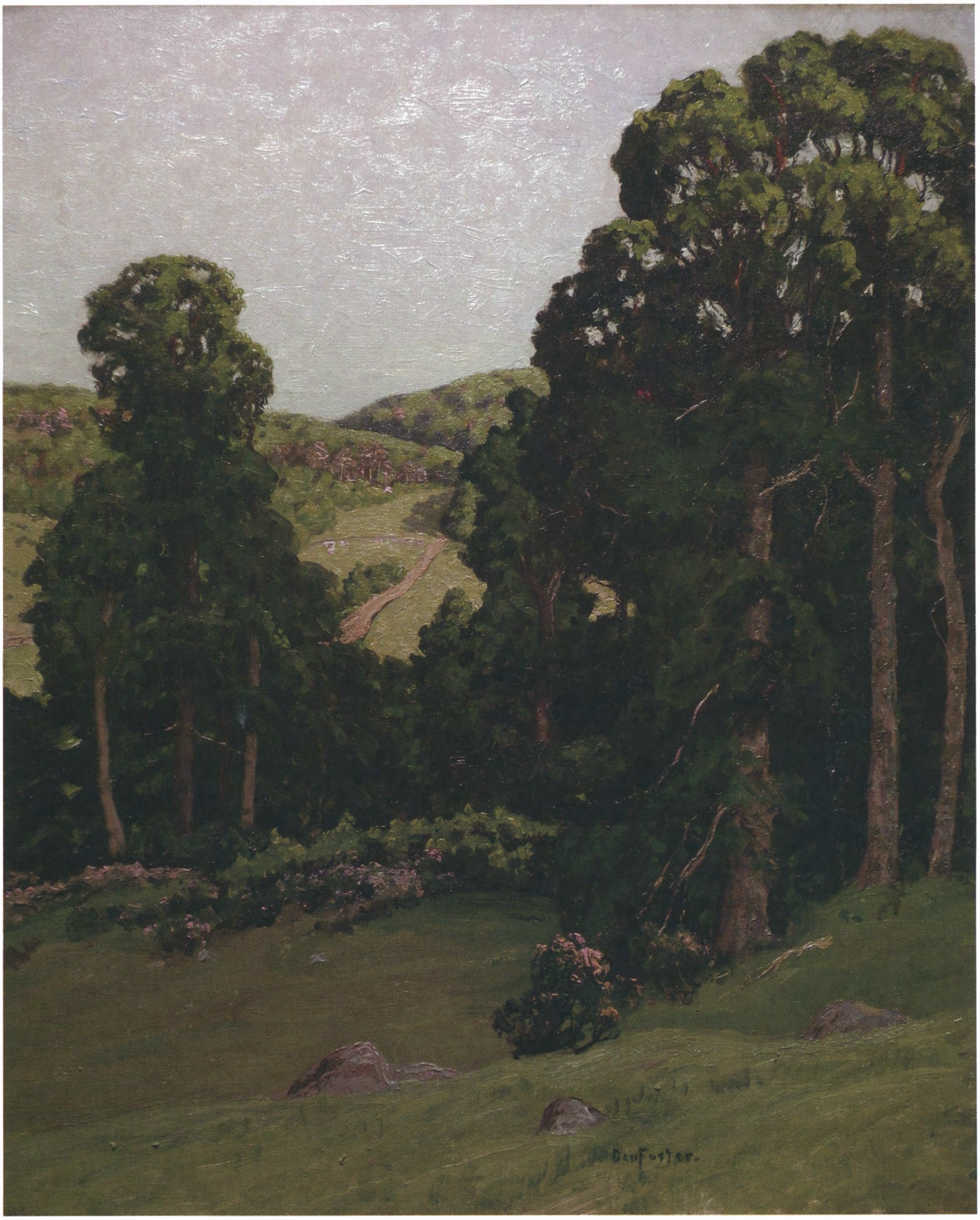


Fig. 88. Ben Foster, *Summer Laurels*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in. Private collection.

natural and man-made symbols, bestowed meanings at once diffuse and profound, personal and universal, appealing to the very human need of peace and quiet—the contemplative spirit most conducive to memory—if not a meditative state best afforded by nature's solitude. A public conversant with Emerson, that had also delved into Thoreau's journals, would have immediately identified with such scenes. Charles Melville Dewey's *Misty Morning*, c. 1910 (fig. 86), invokes both spring's hope for renewal and the sense of pensive wonder so often discovered on home ground, those much-loved places within a short saunter that Thoreau recommended as offering the most rewarding of journeys. Such work speaks to a more diffuse religiosity, a thing touched on in the writings of William James, as one scholar allows: "James shares many predilections

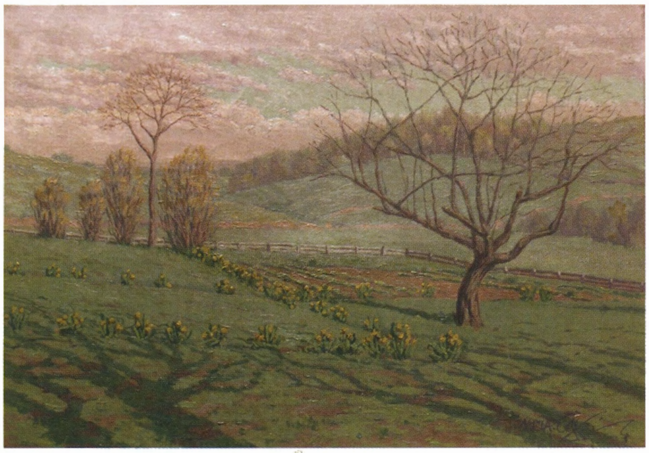


Fig. 89. William Anderson Coffin, *Early Spring*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 14 x 20 in. Private collection.

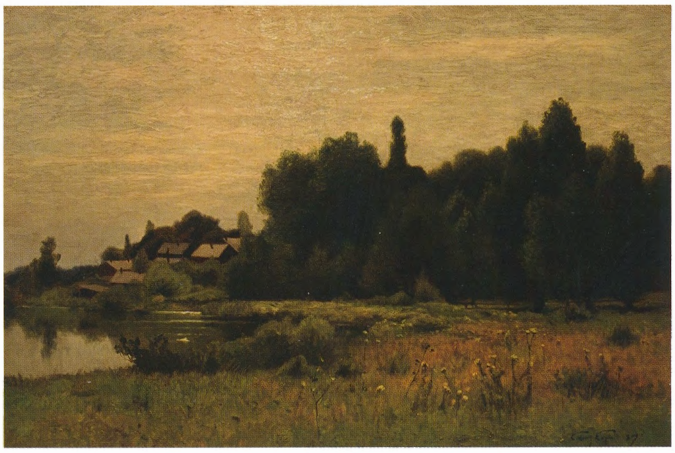


Fig. 90. Charles Harry Eaton, *High Summer*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Private collection.

with Whistler and the Spiritualists. . . . [His] philosophical Tonalism comes to the fore in his analysis of the mind's activities. Our waking state, he asserts, constitutes but one kind of consciousness, 'whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.' Art's purpose is to see through that film and 'fetch there vague vistas of a life continuous with our own, beckoning and inviting, yet ever eluding our pursuit.'"[30] A review of an 1893 exhibition of works by Charles Warren Eaton (see *Gloaming Pines, Forest Edge, Twilit Sky, Hillside Pines, Meadow Light*, and *Moonlit Lake*, figs. 21, 22, 33, 63, 64, and 66, respectively) echoes James's "vague vistas" when describing the spiritual dynamic of Tonalism: "[Eaton] has many many moods, but most of them thoughtful and . . . faintly touched with that sadness without which there is no perfect beauty. He is fond of veiled sunshine, of twilight, of moonbeams and candle gleams of the autumn time when foliage turns to clouds of brown and when forest aisles become places of haunting mystery. He prefers that nature shall be subjective—and manifestation of the thought; and that the thought which it symbolizes be gentle and pure."[31] Eaton's *Catskill Sunset*, 1905 (fig. 87),[32] captures something of the mystery that a lonely walk at twilight engenders, touching on the subjective state that Emerson and Thoreau described as a reciprocity—where the perceiver and the perceived become one—that drew humans closer to nature and the source of their true being. Similar contemplative imagery is invoked in 1916, in the third catastrophic year of World War I, by Charles de Kay, in his review of the Charles Melville Dewey exhibition: "The earth hangs in that atmosphere of peace which strikes most poignantly upon the human heart accustomed to the warring of complex emotions. The large silhouette of the tree masses, the breadth of the nobly designed sky, the solidity of the earth, are elements of that sense of security in the working of eternal laws throughout the universe which the sight of wide horizons at still moments inspires. Against this background of austere peace enters the light with its delicate slow song of lyric joy."[33] De Kay, a poet in his own right and the most perceptive critic of his day, responded avidly to the melancholy otherworldly strains in Dewey's art (see *Long Island Sunset, Twilit Clouds*, and *Sunset*, figs. 9, 36, 80), to what de Kay referred to in his own writings as the "unseen." But such mysterious or ambiguous imagery, often set at the day's closing or in late fall, did not preclude more joyous renditions of nature. An apt example is Ben Foster's *Summer Laurels*, 1910 (fig. 88), in which the artist captures the radiant envelope of spring light in his beloved Cornwall, Connecticut, as it gloriously enfolds the tree lines and laurel-studded hills with a richness of shimmering greens that leaves the beholder breathless at such a luminous rendition of the quotidian. An even more prosaic rendering, such as William Anderson Coffin's *Early Spring*, c. 1910 (fig. 89), touches an ethereal note, where, on closer examination, the lengthening tree shadows on the grass turn out to be the true subject; these bare-branched shapes cast by invisible trees invoke a feeling for early spring sunlight at day's end and a sense of joy at the rows of daffodils, harbingers of blossom time to come.

It is hard to conceive of another artistic movement beyond the great ages of medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque art that responded so profoundly to the fast-evolving spiritual needs of a bereft nation. This spiritual dimension, both melancholy and hopeful, inherent in Tonalism, is reinforced and expressed by many of the style's essential characteristics already enumerated—the mysterious, ambiguous, suggestive, poetic, elegiac, quiet, solitary, timeless, memory-filled, symbolic, abstract, metamorphic, transcendent, subjective, expressive—intuiting the invisible or hidden forces in nature, and employing colors muted, restful, and conducive to a meditative state of mind. Such a state of pure bliss is surely captured in the simple charms of Charles Harry Eaton's *High Summer*, 1887 (fig. 90), which marvelously describes a bucolic moment, perhaps somewhere dear to the artist—an elysian setting with deftly detailed wildflowers that speaks directly to the troubled heart of a distant age.

12. A nonnarrative synthetic art that stresses the feeling or mood evoked by the arrangement of landscape elements to project an emotion, rather than focusing on an overtly realistic or representational depiction of a certain time and place. Tonalism is a studio-based art that relies on memory, imagination, and improvisation, often moving toward depictions of fantasy and dream.

Life is not a thing of knowing only—nay, mere knowledge has properly no place at all save as it becomes the handmaiden of feeling and emotion.

Judge Learned Hand, 1893

Finally, it cannot be stressed enough that the defining characteristic of Tonalism, especially vis-à-vis French Impressionism and its American counterpart (if not competitors in Tonalism's heyday, certainly offering an alternative aesthetic that the Tonalists mostly rejected), is its strictly nonnarrative stance and focus on describing the subjective feeling of landscape under subdued and suggestive light, as opposed to the Impressionists' dissection of the various qualities of bright sunshine flooding the landscape. Tonalism is fundamentally a synthetic studio art, derived from field sketches and memory but concentrating its picture-making energies on formal and abstract values that evoke emotion without recourse to an explicit story or place. Whistler, as in so many things, was the greatest exponent of memory as the key technical adjunct to this nonnarrative, essentially conceptual studio art (art for art's sake), while Degas and Monet developed their own artistic credo and techniques based on field notes, imagination, and the manipulation of their medium to achieve similar results as Whistler and his followers. Leonard Ochtman, writing around 1909 in *Palette and Brush*, emphasized this Whistlerian imperative among his peers, noting how all his paintings were done in his studio from memory and notes: "[My paintings] are arranged, composed; they represent not a particular place, but give to the best of my ability, the character, color, and atmospheric conditions of the country in which I live year round."[34] The use of broken facture with vivid primary colors was rarely employed by the Tonalists, who were perfectly adept at this Impressionist technique but preferred expressive brushwork employing closely matched tones, which tended to evoke a visual mood rather than the qualitative dissection of bright sunlight, much less the depiction of everyday life and related recreational activities, subjects dear to the French Impressionists and adopted by their American followers.

This is not to say that the Tonalists entirely rejected a story line or even the use of figures to occasionally elaborate upon an overall sense of mood, but these personages when they do appear tend to be fully integrated into the scene, sometimes to the point of near invisibility. A particularly poignant example can be found in Robert Minor's *Reverie*, c. 1900 (fig. 91), where the lone figure along the riverbank adds a touch of romance or mystery to the haunting scene. Even a third-generation Tonalist like Clifford Addams, born after 1865 (see p. 572), a friend and follower of Whistler who was drawn to more explicit narratives, nevertheless cloaks his characters in fantasy and whimsy, and offers a perfect example of how the unassuming narrative content of Tonalism could be expanded upon and elaborated in new ways in the early part of the twentieth century. Addams's urban subject *Union Square*, c. 1928 (fig. 92), allows us a glimpse of the fascinating near-visionary quality of this artist's mature work, when he'd shed the aesthetic polish of his earlier exhibition pieces for something wholly modern but distinctly grounded in hard-won painterly skills. Much of the early Whistlerian tonalities remain, along with the lush use of muted colors to evoke a city in the first blush of evening. But it is the expressive quality of the brushwork mirroring the energetic bustle of the city that captivates and that allies Addams with Robert Henri's circle of urban realists working in their grittier style around 1900. There is, too, a deep affection for the hard life of the streets and the teeming crowd of passersby. The packed sidewalk along Fourteenth Street, over which the sign for Orbachs, the famous department store, hangs prominently, fairly seethes with rambling shoppers and sidewalk vendors. This is not a tourist view but a nonsentimental evocation of a city electric with felt life. The paint marks are as alive as the fabric of the city they depict, full of febrile otherworldliness,

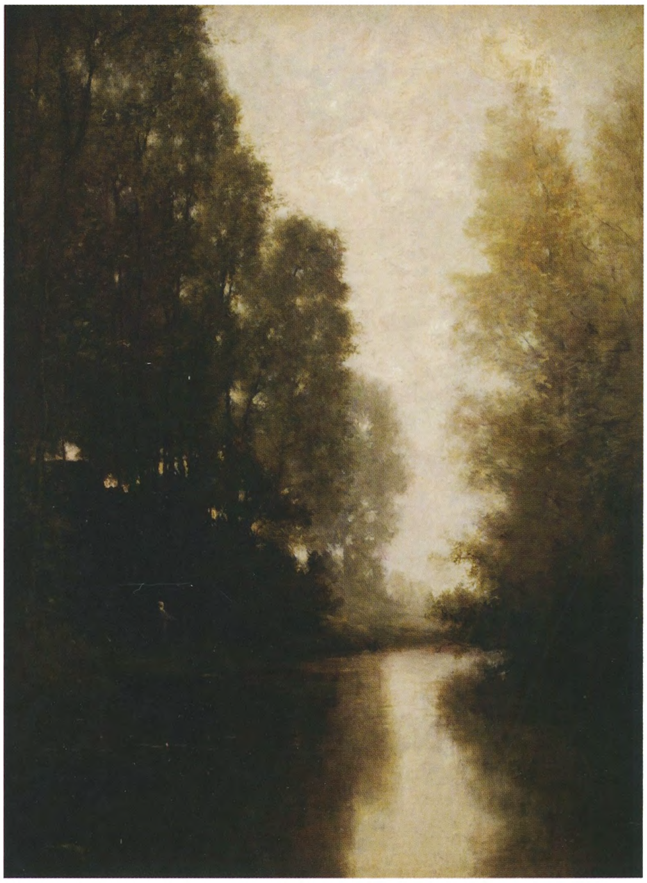


Fig. 91. Robert Minor, *Reverie*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 22 x 16 in. Private collection.

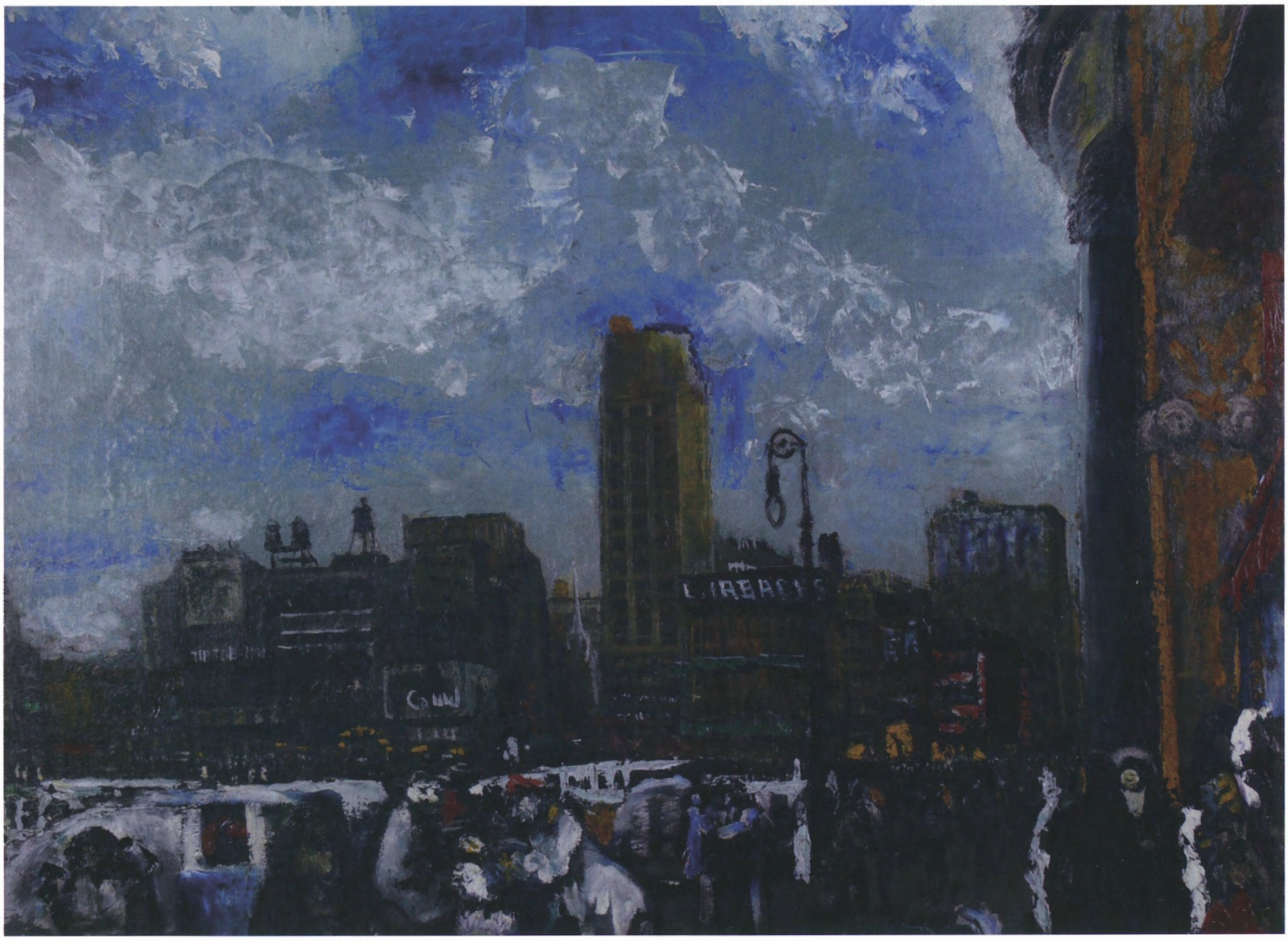


Fig. 92. Clifford Addams, *Union Square*, c. 1928. Oil on canvas, 30 x 42 in. Private collection.

as twilight descends and the neon signs of the city begin to emit their eerie glow. Very few of Addams's foreground figures can even be identified as distinct pedestrians, so vivid is the abstraction of form, an abstraction that acts to viscerally communicate the honking crush and jostled blur of rush hour. In its day, *Union Square* cannot have been an easy picture to love, or to sell, except to a sophisticated viewer able to respond to the formal panache of the composition and the visual pleasures to be found in every nook and cranny of the canvas, chockablock with slathered and slashed paint marks, some delivered with the dash of a palette knife and others with hard-edged precision. The narrative element is entirely subservient to the aesthetic impact of the whole. Addams was a prolific printmaker as well, and as in so many of his prints, there is in this canvas a distinct sense of the theatrical, as if city life, whether in New York or Venice, is but a larger stage for our all-too-human follies.

There is not enough space to go into Addams's extensive oeuvre as an etcher (see pages 256–57), a calling he learned at the knee of Whistler, whose genius he nearly approximates. But two works beg our attention as examples of how the etching medium could be exploited with the use of varying plate tones to create very different moods from the same image, something both Whistler and Addams were masters at. Two states of Addams's *Obscure Turning, Venice*, c. 1914 (figs. 93 and 94), display the artist's whimsical character to the full. Version one is a minimalist composition, made up almost entirely of the white reserve of the paper, with only the barest architectural motifs sketched in to define the canal setting. The focus is on the two water doors, where three rather exotic figures stare out from the shadowy interior, while a fourth, standing figure on the left peeks around the corner wall from a perch on the prow of a gondola. The darkened doorways are a kind of homage to the master, Whistler, who loved the contrast of darkened passages bathed in water-reflected sunlight, or *gibigianna* in Italian. Here, Addams seems more interested in the fanciful theatricality this exotic setting allows, creating a kind of visual tension as these personages stare into our space as we peer into theirs. There is a palpable sense of timelessness, of stillness in the bare-bones composition, further enhanced by the costumed interior figures, who might as well be from Venice's distant past as present. A second, nocturnal version of *Obscure Turning* displays Addams's love of manipulating his plates with varied inkings and wipings to produce startlingly different effects, much as Whistler had done with his Venice

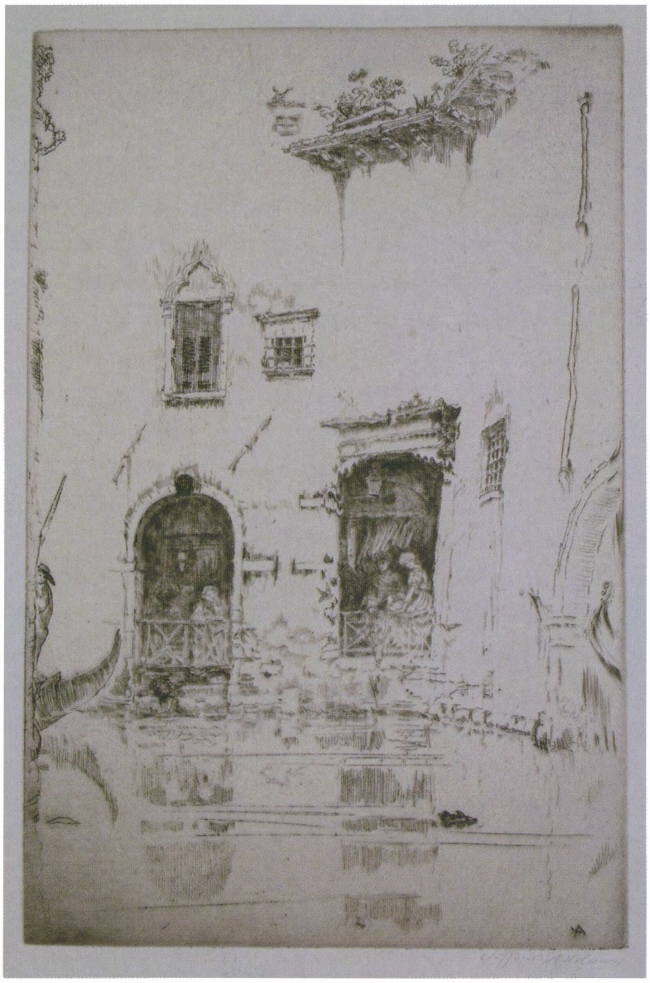


Fig. 93. Clifford Addams, *Obscure Turning, Venice*, c. 1914 (state one). Etching, 12 x 8 in. Private collection.

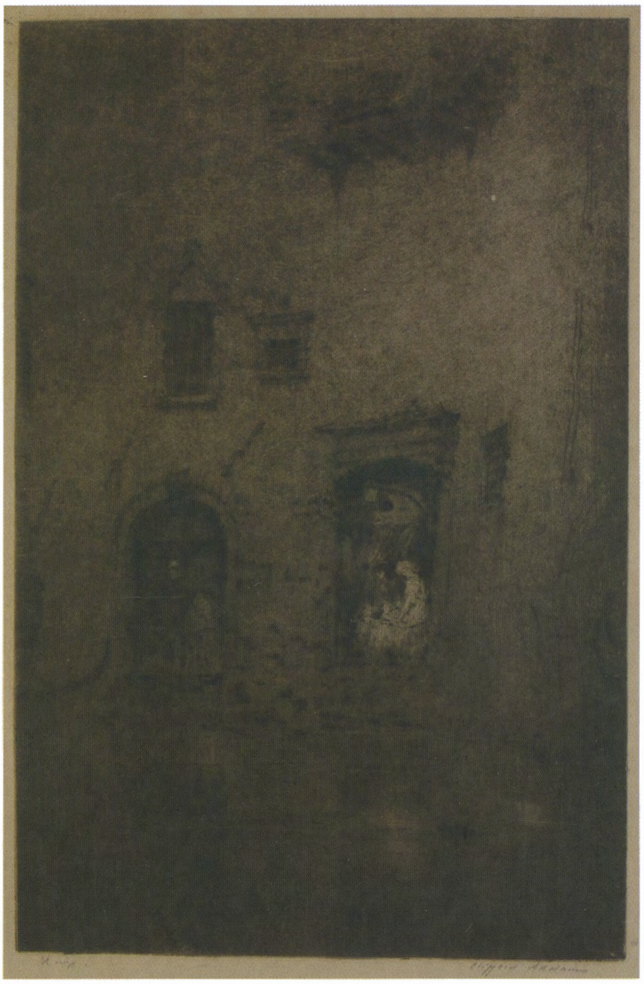


Fig. 94. Clifford Addams, *Obscure Turning, Venice*, c. 1914 (state two). Etching, 12 x 8 in. Private collection.

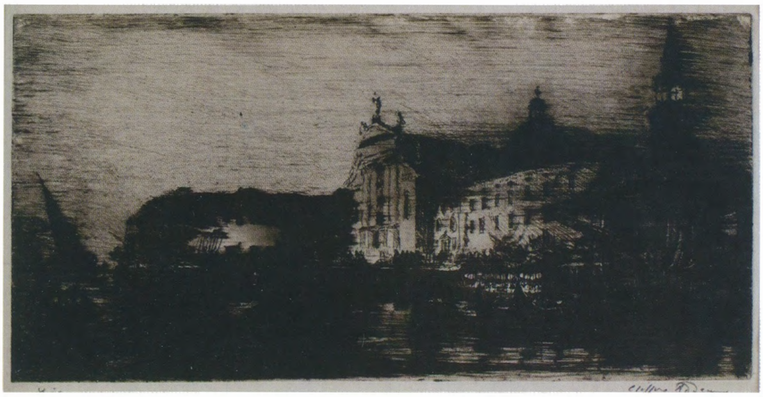


Fig. 95. Clifford Addams, *San Giorgio, Nocturne, Venice*, c. 1914 (state one). Etching, 7 x 13 in. Private collection.

Fig. 96. Clifford Addams, *San Giorgio, Nocturne, Venice*, c. 1914 (state two). Etching, 7 x 13 in. Private collection.

etchings in the 1880s. Here, in the nocturnal version, a delicate wiping highlights the phantom figures in the two doorways and the shimmer of reflected interior light in the canal below. A kind of polar opposite or reversal of the daylight version, this more tonal version focuses the eye firmly on the central figure and creates a somewhat haunting, strange, even eerie composition, as the eye seeks to interpret the interaction of the figures as they gaze out upon the night. Addams's *San Giorgio, Nocturne, Venice*, c. 1914 (figs. 95 and 96), again displays how various wipings can dramatically shift the inherent narrative of the scene—a torchlit procession, a religious ceremony—highlighting some aspects, downplaying others; it is a textbook and masterful demonstration of the use of tonality to project different moods, even different narratives in the same subject.

As we have seen, William Gedney Bunce's Venetian pictures eschew a story line, containing no figures, neither tourists nor

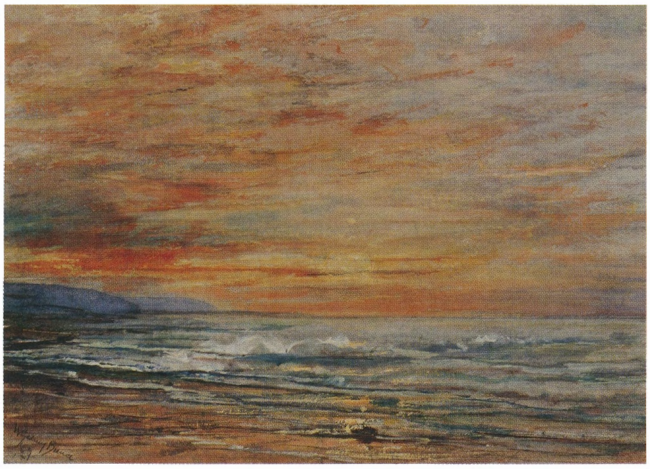


Fig. 97. William Gedney Bunce, *Beach Tides*, 1889. Watercolor, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

locals, not even a gondola; and even a fairly traditional marine scene, *Beach Tides*, 1889 (fig. 97), includes none of the holidaymakers or sailboats that populate the works of Eugène Boudin and other French and English painters of the day. Bunce's lush, expressive brushstrokes tell no story, but in their severe horizontals and crazy-quilt abstraction, broken by whitecaps and the hinted curve of the sun, they do capture something rarer still: the subjective essence of a beach at sunset, which allows the viewer to make the moment his or her own. In a similar vein, Charles Warren Eaton's *Wiscasset, Maine*, 1891 (fig. 98), depicts another kind of summer beachside gathering. Shimmering in the humid heat is a confab of huge boulders lounging by the bay, which tell their own quiet tale of endurance against the tides, while farther out, a rocky shoal hovers in the emptiness of light that is no more than the untouched ground of the paper. A seemingly conventional harvest scene by Bruce Crane, *Autumn Dreams*, c. 1910 (fig. 99), appeals more to memory and association to tell its story, here expressed in the warm, atmospheric colors of fall, while the formal equanimity of the compositional elements, including the haystacks, cut logs, stone walls, and white facade of a distant farmhouse—all enveloped in the warm, saturated air, redolent of dry leaves—tell a story as well, one that is more in the mind of the viewer than writ on the canvas. Even an urban or town setting, like the one in Alexander Shilling's *Winter Road*, 1883 (fig. 100), though without obvious signs of human activity, nevertheless hints at ongoing daily life in the cart tracks in the snowy road and perhaps the wintry thoughts invoked. As Wallace Stevens so eloquently put it: "One must have a mind of winter / For the listener, who listens in the snow / And nothing himself beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." The same "nothing that is"

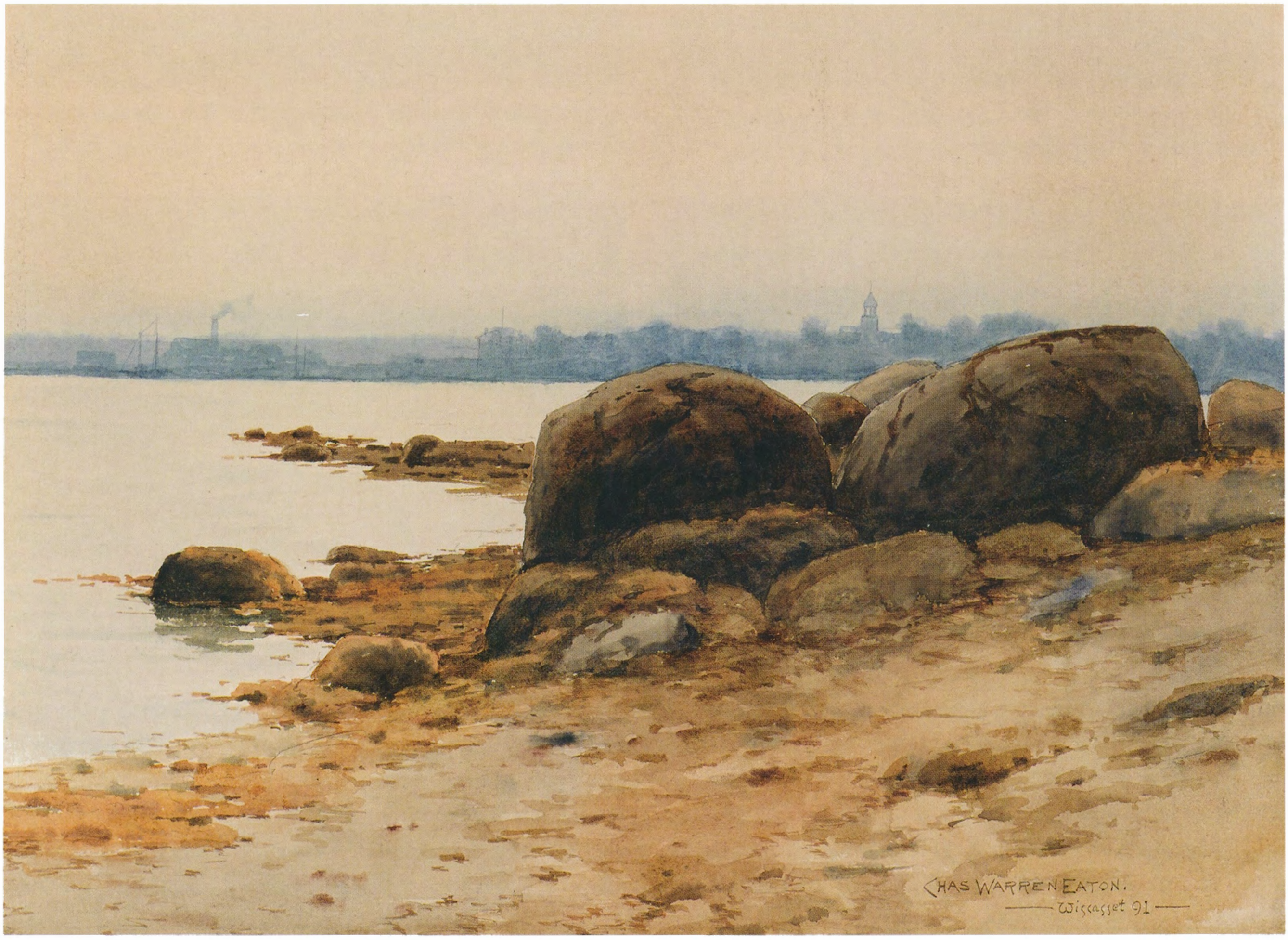


Fig. 98. Charles Warren Eaton, *Wiscasset, Maine*, 1891. Watercolor, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

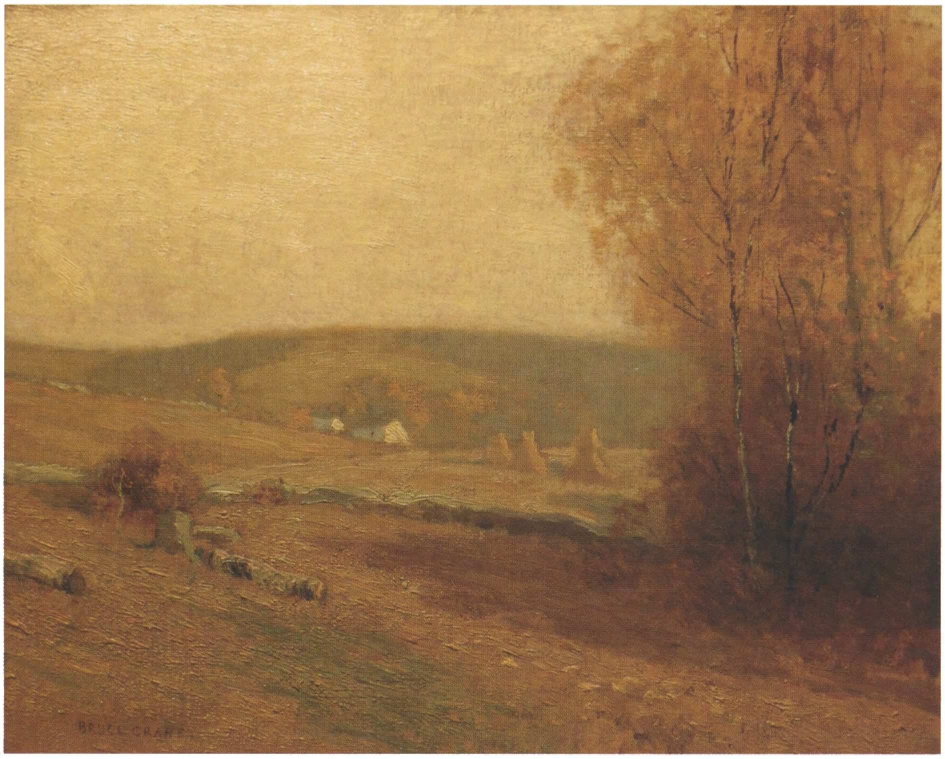


Fig. 99. Bruce Crane, *Autumn Dreams*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in. Private collection.

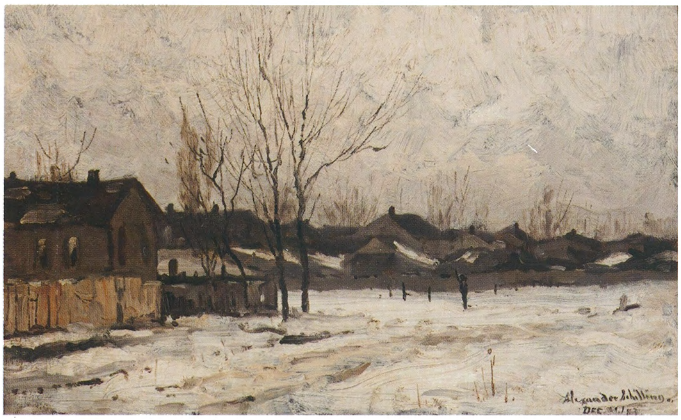


Fig. 100. Alexander Shilling, *Winter Road*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 10 x 16 in. Private collection.

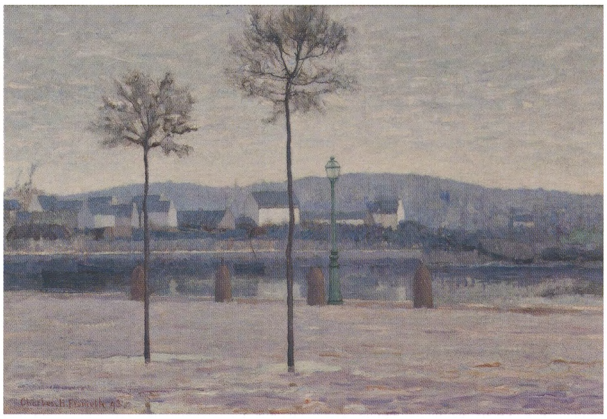


Fig. 101. Charles Fromuth, *Concarneau*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 21 x 31 in. Private collection.

whispers forth in Charles Fromuth's *Concarneau*, 1893 (fig. 101), in which the usually busy quayside serves solely as a prop for the artist's exploration of muted color and the formal arrangement of trees and house geometries in a snug harbor setting: a haunting nonnarrative narrative of a misty quayside in Brittany translated by the artist into a universal language. The same contemplative or imaginative spirit can be found in Alexander Van Laer's *Fall Breeze*, c. 1910 (fig. 102), in which the arrangement of trees, meadow grasses, stream, and clouds is flattened into matrices of muted color to convincingly convey the essence of autumn, especially the boughs heeling sideways in the chilly wind. Such a sparse composition invites the subjective gaze of the viewer to range freely and so intuit the seasonal narrative as his or her own. It is these kinds of poetic, less-than-explicit

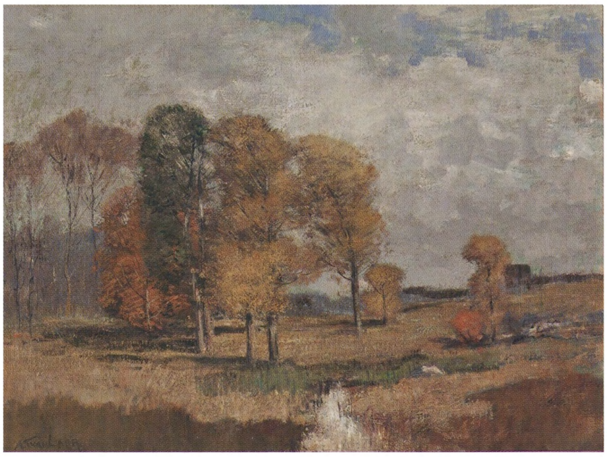


Fig. 102. Alexander Van Laer, *Fall Breeze*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 20 x 27 in. Private collection.

renderings, along with many other technical dimensions of the style, that made Tonalism such a sophisticated and progressive force in the art scene of its day and, in the hands of its leading practitioners, allied Tonalism directly to cutting-edge developments of post-Impressionism in Europe. By eschewing traditional narrative tropes of landscape (farmers, livestock, barns, conveyances) and the clichéd specifics of place, Tonalist artists were able to concentrate upon the abstract and symbolic essence of the landscape, and so discover the many told-yet-untold stories abiding in the land, a saga at once profoundly personal yet universal, the more so for being largely intuited by the viewer.

THE POETRY OF TONALISM: EDGAR ALLAN POE, WHISTLER, DEGAS, AND PROUST

As the above review of the twelve characteristics of Tonalism demonstrates, the essential artist was Whistler, who developed and disseminated so many of the movement's underlying principles. And so it is one of the great ironies of American art history that Whistler, perhaps the most innovative and influential of all American artists, should have been airbrushed from the pantheon of modernism by none other than Alfred Barr, in his influential 1936 exhibition, *Cubism and Abstract Art* (see p. 556), held at the Museum of Modern Art. In the accompanying catalog, in a schematic diagram spelling out the various bloodlines of modernism, Whistler, much less Tonalism, finds no place. From the vantage point of the Eurocentric and Marxian enthusiasms of the 1930s, Whistler was considered an effete artist of the Gilded Age, and his doctrine of art for art's sake an etiolated extravagance of the wealthy lacking any redeeming social justification. Over the past twenty years, numerous exhibitions and further scholarship on Whistler and his followers have turned this blinkered view on its head: Whistler can now be seen as *the* critical influence in both the United States and Europe in the development of modern art, who did not just provide an alternative to Impressionism in the 1870s but forged a post-Impressionist Tonalist style that contained the seeds of many subsequent modernist trends. Whistler's soft-edged nonnarrative abstraction and the technical resources he developed to portray his visual poetry were adopted by the Symbolists, the Nabis, and other post-Impressionist offshoots, such as the Austrians Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele, and early Picasso of the Blue Period. Whistler's legion of followers and colleagues in the Parisian art world would include Degas, Paul Gauguin, Paul Cézanne, and Monet (all usually associated with the Impressionists), and later Bonnard, Vuillard, Odilon Redon, and Walter Sickert in England, and scores of his fellow Americans, including Ralph Albert Blakelock, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Robert Henri, William Glackens, John Sloan, William Redfield, Arthur Bowen Davies, Henry Muhrman, Marsden Hartley, and Arthur Dove, to name only a few. Among the classic moderns, Milton Avery, Mark Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Louis, and Wolf Kahn would all stand on Whistler's shoulders. While all this is broadly spelled out in the first edition of this book, one point totally eluded me: just how much of Whistler's style was derived from an indigenous American source—namely, the literary philosophy and poetry of Edgar Allan Poe—and how Whistler's innovations and artistic persona, channeling the model of Poe's poetry, in turn, not only inspired many important European artists but fundamentally influenced perhaps the greatest of all novelists, Marcel Proust.

Whistler's early biographers, Joseph and Elizabeth Pennell, who knew the artist intimately, were always impressed by how conversant he was with contemporary literature, American, British, and French. They noted that Whistler's reading during his student days in Paris formed many of his convictions, both preferences and prejudices: "His admiration for Poe, a West Point man, was strengthened by the hold Poe had taken of French men of letters. His disdain of nature, his contempt for anecdote in art as a concession to the ignorant public, his translation of the subjects of painting into musical terms, and much else charged against him as deliberate pose, can be traced to Baudelaire."[35] Whistler was a friend of Charles Baudelaire, and they shared many acquaintances in common. Early in his career, Whistler discovered that Baudelaire had embraced Poe as a poet and theoretician, especially his rejection of photographic realism and naturalism for a poetry that evoked responses by association and stressed repetition and variation as means to sensual pleasure. Whistler translated this visually by emphasizing a predominant color tone and then repeating and varying the color in a recurring pattern to create a formal composition that appealed both emotionally and as a decorative construct; see Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1*, 1862 (fig. 103). It was precisely this cosmopolitan stance as an outsider, straddling his homeland and artistic circles in London and Paris, that allowed Whistler to become such an innovative and pathbreaking artist.

Edgar Allan Poe influenced not just Whistler and Baudelaire but Algernon Charles Swinburne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti as well. Whistler found his countryman particularly congenial, since the writer, too, had been kicked out of West Point for lack of discipline, three years before Whistler was born. In his 1846 essay "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe analyzed how he went about composing his poem "The Raven." It was here that Whistler discovered the key elements that would form his Tonalist style: concentration on overall effect, sensuous atmospheric feeling, repetition and variation, love of beauty for beauty's sake, and suggestiveness.

Poe wrote that the composition of poetry was best served by keeping uppermost in mind the effect of the whole, or the peculiar tone to be imparted, rather than the incident or

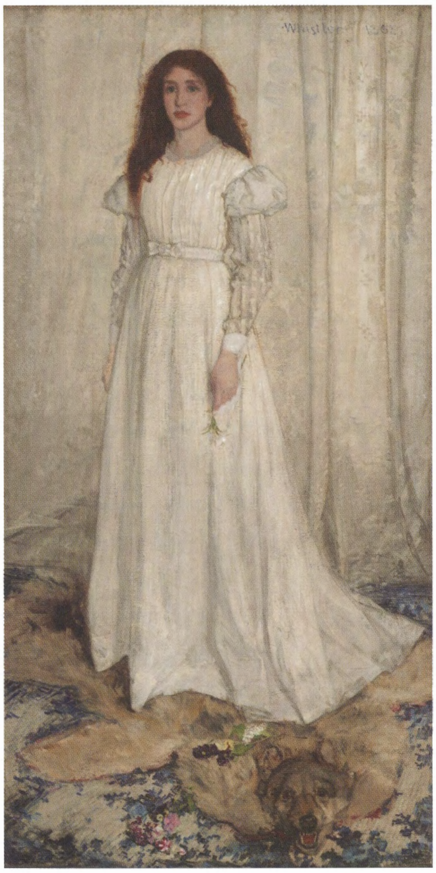


Fig. 103. James McNeill Whistler, *Symphony in White, No. 1*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 83⅞ x 42½ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Harris Whittemore Collection.

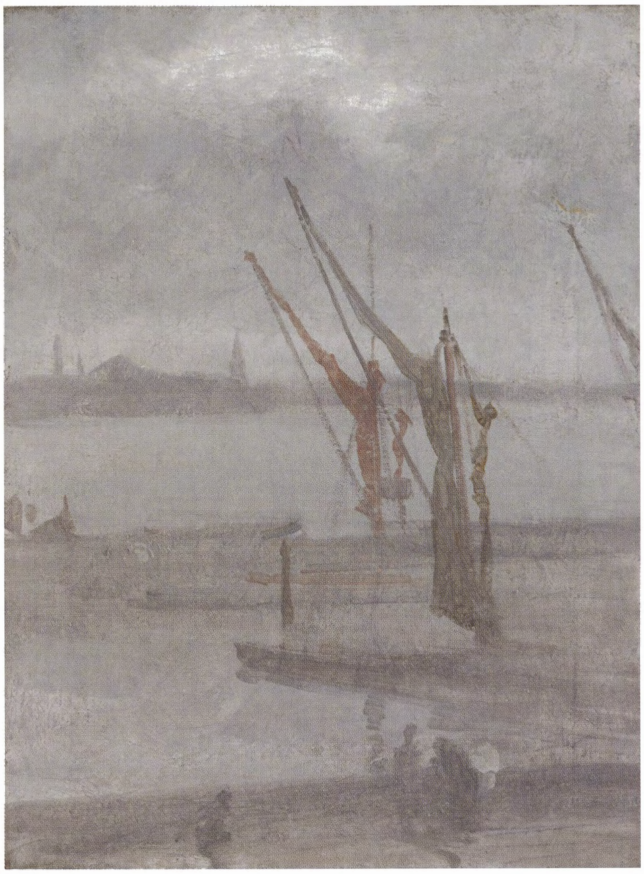


Fig. 104. James McNeill Whistler, *Grey and Silver*, c. 1864–68. Oil on canvas, 24 x 18 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Widener Collection.

plot—all to sustain what he described as the "totality, or unity of effect." "Beauty," he declared, "is the sole legitimate province of the poem." Poe compared incident or plot (narrative in painting) to the way in which discord is employed in music to provide contrast: "but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and, secondly, to enveil them, as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem."[36]

Poe goes on to explain that the use of a repeating refrain is crucial to building a certain mood and giving pleasure to the reader. This idea of repetition and variation, a constant undertone to project a mood and give unity to the composition, would be eagerly adopted by Whistler in his painting methods. As Poe's had used the refrain or repetition—for instance, "Nevermore" in "The Raven"—Whistler adopted a single dominant color or tone, repeated throughout the painting in variations, so following the poet's admonition that the overall unity of a work, "depends for its impression upon the force of the monotone."[37] For Whistler, this monotone was achieved by using a close range of complementary tones, more monochromatic than polychromatic, in effect embroidering the canvas with a predominant color to heighten the emotional resonance of the whole; see Whistler's *Grey and Silver*, c. 1864–68 (fig. 104).

Poe noted as well: "Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones." This was something Whistler and his fellow Tonalists would embrace by painting landscapes under mostly cloudy or foggy conditions or evoking autumnal moods, especially at dawn or dusk. Two crucial aspects of art, wrote Poe, are, first, a degree of complexity, and second, suggestiveness, "some under-current, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness*. . . . It is the excess of the suggested meaning—it is the rendering of this the upper instead of the under-current of the theme—which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind)."[38] In other words, at least as it applies to the visual arts, the scene depicted—to use an admonition from literary art—must show, not tell. The hidden meaning, the suggested meaning, must be only hinted at, so allowing the imagination and sensitivities of the viewer to add their own narrative. As we have seen in the twelve characteristics of Tonalism: the suggestive quality of a painting, its mystery and ambiguity—the feeling it invoked—was always the goal of the very best artists.

As a young man, Whistler eagerly embraced Poe's theories, eschewing blatant narrative and concentrating his focus on a kind of suggestive minimalism, using variations on one or two colors at a time, and employing those colors throughout the composition to achieve unity of effect and a kind of visual

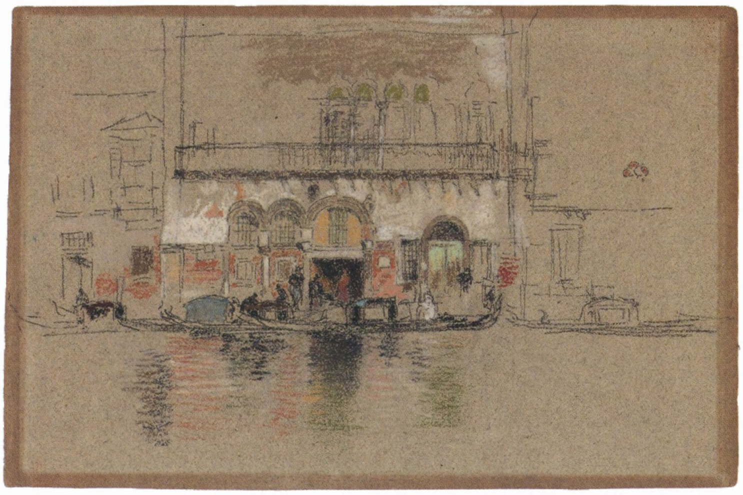


Fig. 105. James McNeill Whistler, *The Palace, White and Pink*, 1879–80. Pastel and black chalk on gray-brown wove oatmeal paper, 7¾ x 11¹³⁄₁₆ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

poetry that would revolutionize the art world from New York to London and Paris. Whistler's *The Palace, White and Pink*, 1879–80 (fig. 105), fully displays these traits in a sketchy composition with only the barest jottings of line and color to suggest a Venice that in reality would be teeming with color and detail: what Whistler has captured is the essence of time and place—a fleeting moment, a glimpse, the glorious afterimage. Strangely enough, as we shall see below, Whistler's aesthetic stance, originally inspired by poets Poe and Baudelaire, and later elaborated on in his own writings *The Ten O'Clock*, translated by Stéphane Mallarmé, and *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, would in turn come to influence writers such as Proust, Henry James, and later Ezra Pound.

In the first edition, I noted the suggestive Tonalist character of much of Henry James's late writing but was unaware of just how much the two expatriate Americans admired each other's respective craft, and how attuned each was to the use of the allusive and ephemeral—a kind of whispered poetic subjectivity or undertone as an artistic strategy. James, as a critic, had described Whistler's work as "One of the finest of all distillations of artistic intelligence." In a letter he wrote to Whistler, to thank him for his kind words about his short story "The Spoils of Poynton," James noted the sensibilities they shared: "To have pleased you, to have touched you, to have given you something of the impression of the decent little thing one attempted to do—this is for me, my dear Whistler, a rare and peculiar pleasure . . . but don't doubt that something vibrates back when that Exquisite takes the form of recognition of a not utterly indelicate brother . . . my dear Master."[39] By 1912, Ezra Pound, touting Whistler as America's only great artist, explained that his own desire to remake American poetry was "an endeavor to carry into our American poetry the same sort of life and intensity which [Whistler] infused into modern painting." Pound described James and Whistler as the greatest American artists, and wrote that the works in a Whistler retrospective exhibition displayed: "more courage for living than I have gathered from . . . any other manifest American energy whatsoever." With Whistler, the world had "a man, born American, with all our forces of confusion within him, who has contrived to keep order in his work, who has attained the highest mastery, and this not by a natural facility, but by constant labour and searching."[40] Pound's encomium for his fellow expatriate is doubly ironic in that for most of the twentieth century, while Whistler was claimed by both the British and the French art establishment, he was often disparaged in his homeland and only recently has been accepted and lauded as a true American genius. Poe's standing, meanwhile, has suffered a precipitous decline in the last half century from modern critics.[41]

Another striking example of Whistler's influence within the international art world, a subject we couldn't make room for in the first edition, is the American's impact on the work of Edgar Degas, an influence hiding in plain sight and widely displayed in the artist's pastels and late landscapes, especially the monotypes.

Degas

Although Degas was always a mainstay and supporter of the Impressionists throughout their eight joint exhibitions from 1874 to 1886, he was also something of an odd man out—as Whistler would have been had he chosen to accept Degas's invitation to join the group. Degas's reverence for draftsmanship and the figurative tradition of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, much less his lack of interest in working *en plein air*, immediately placed him outside the mainstream Impressionists' fascination with the dissection of bright sunlight by using broken brushwork and primary colors. Among other things, Degas had an eye condition that made him ultrasensitive to bright light. He preferred field sketches, which he worked from in the studio, much in the manner of the old masters, as Whistler did as well; and, as Baudelaire and Poe had advocated, Degas put a premium on memory, imagination, and experimental methods to capture the fleetingness of natural phenomena. His compositions' schematic armature was often formally arranged for dramatic and emotional effect, whether pure landscape, horses and riders, or ballet dancers. The late landscapes, monotypes, pastels, and oils drop almost all figurative motifs or narrative elements, reinforcing Degas's prevailing tendency for the conceptual and abstract—so gaining more power and emotional depth precisely to the degree they break with quotidian as-is renditions of landscape. Degas's *Pathway in a Field*, 1890 (fig. 106), pastel over monotype in oil colors, verges on complete abstraction, with the various forms created by the sinuous path pushed forward to the front plane of the composition, highlighting both their two-dimensional quality and the mesmerizing patterns that compose the subject. And as Whistler had advocated,

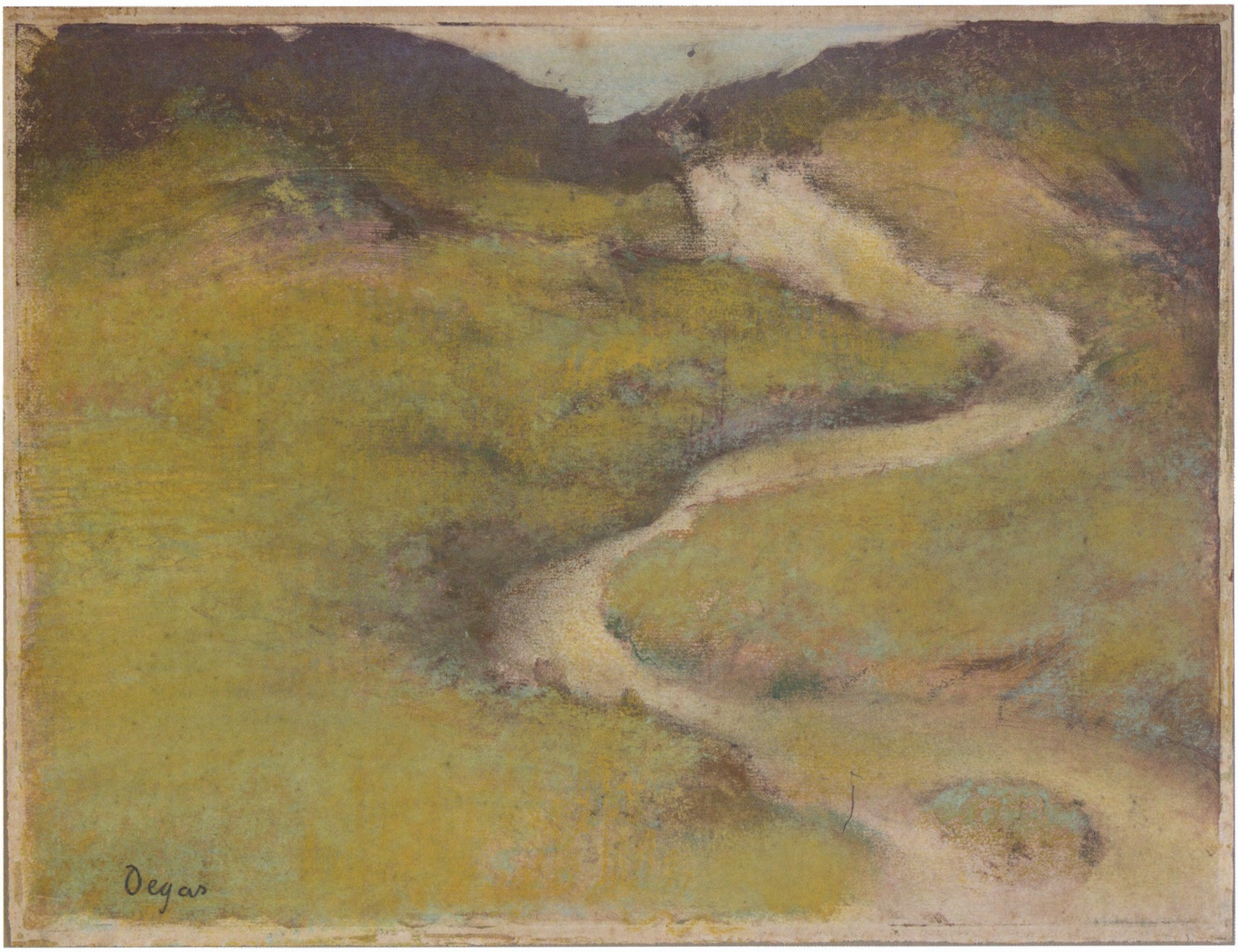


Fig. 106. Edgar Degas, *Pathway in a Field*, 1890. Pastel over monotype in oil colors, 11 13/16 x 15 9/16 in. Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut.

following in Poe's footsteps, Degas has employed a predominantly greenish-yellow tonality throughout, a unifying strategy he would increasingly follow, especially in his pastels, which gives many of these works a somber richness. Degas scholar Richard Kendall, who has revolutionized our understanding of Degas's landscapes, writes that the artist preferred to work from memory and then freely improvise to achieve his vibrant creations, which often had little to do with the original inspiration, whether glimpsed in passing from a train or carriage or recorded in sketches or photographs. "Such observations have the effect of distancing some of Degas's imagery from the factual landscape, enhancing the subjective functions of memory and vision, and stressing the role of technique in the definition of his subject-matter."[42] Or as Degas explained, referring to the difficulties of memory work: "It is very good to copy what one sees; it is much better to draw what you can't see any more but in your memory. It is a transformation in which imagination and memory work together. You only reproduce what struck you, that is to say the necessary. That way, your memories and your fantasy are freed from the tyranny of nature. . . . A painting requires a little mystery, some vagueness, some fantasy. When you always make your meaning perfectly plain you end up boring people."[43]

What is so striking about Degas's radical landscapes from the perspective of a book on the history of American Tonalism is how reminiscent the artist's landscapes are of the more experimental work of Degas's friend Whistler, beginning in the 1860s with such iconic game-changers as *Harmony in Blue and Silver, Trouville*, 1865 (see fig. 3.59, p. 128). But the comparison would be equally apt to the most progressive American Tonalists, such as George Inness, J. Frank Currier (*Gloaming*, c. 1880s, fig. 107), Ralph Blakelock, Albert Ryder, and Henry Muhrman (see *Boats at Kew*, fig. 111), among others, all displaying a family resemblance that begs further explanation. Part of such an explanation surely lies in a common yearning on both sides of the Atlantic for an art that touches on visceral emotions and aspires to spiritual states. Commentators on Degas's 1892 monotype exhibition were drawn to the artist's embrace of Symbolist themes, as noted by a critic in the periodical *L'Ermitage*, who wrote that Degas "possesses the secret of chiaroscuros, like an astral presence burdened with ghosts, as well as with vague and suggestive colours with which he clouds his

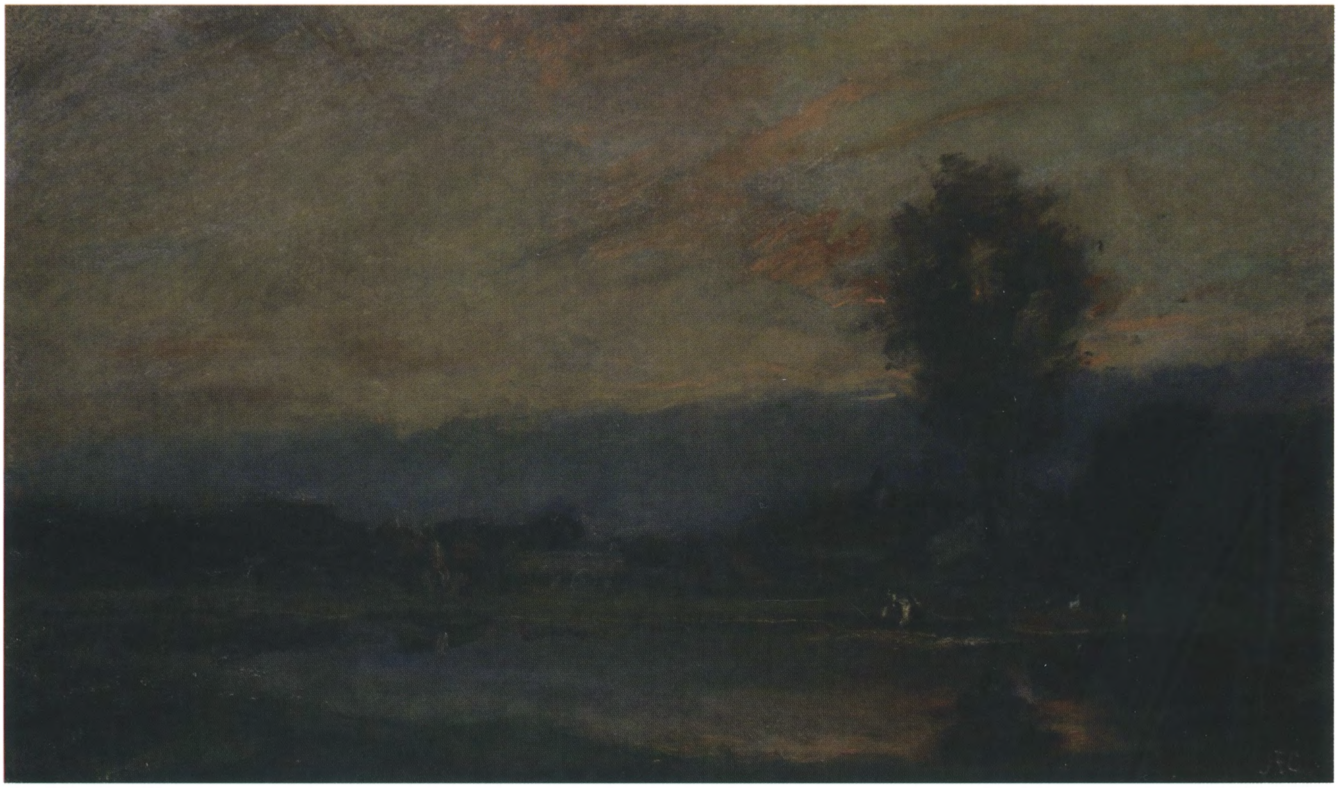


Fig. 107. J. Frank Currier, (*Gloaming*) *Sunset*, c. 1880s. Pastel, 6 x 14 in. Private collection.

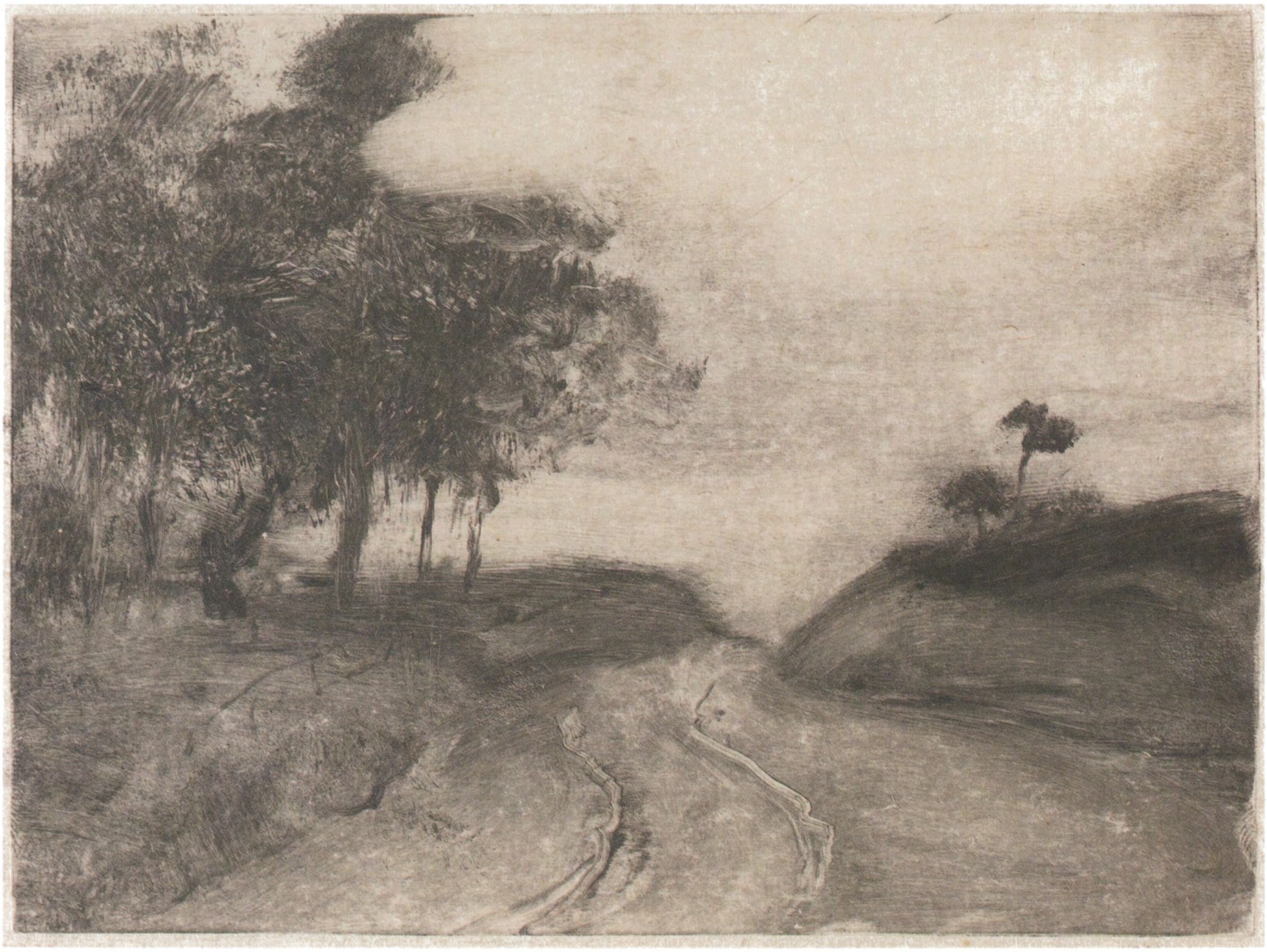


Fig. 108. Edgar Degas, *The Road*, 1878–80. Monotype (black ink) on china paper, plate: 4 5/16 x 6 5/16 in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Rosenwald Collection.

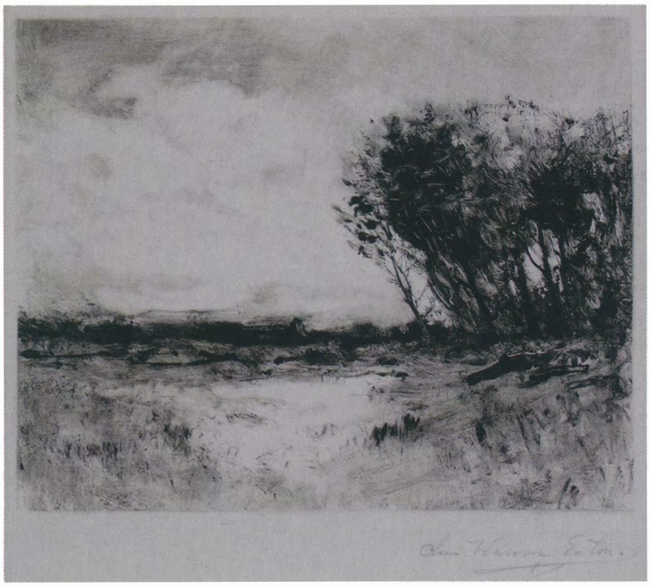


Fig. 109. Charles Warren Eaton, *Quiet Meadow*, c. 1900. Monotype, 7½ x 9½ in. Private collection.

figures, so that they loom out of the twilight, pale and haunting like materialized apparitions."[44] Degas's monotype *The Road*, 1878–80 (fig. 108), exudes an expressive power and feeling for the aliveness of the landscape that reminds one of the monotypes of Charles Warren Eaton, such as *Quiet Meadow*, c. 1900 (fig. 109). Whether Eaton had seen any of Degas's monotypes or late landscapes on his trips to Europe is not known, but more likely they were mutually attracted to Symbolist themes that stirred the imaginations of many turn-of-the-century artists.

As I have noted in this book, including above, in "The Twelve Characteristics of Tonalism," many of the same spiritualizing energies found in European Symbolism had their counterparts in the American cultural scene, whether in Emanuel Swedenborg's influence on artists like George Inness, or the impact of the Transcendentalist writers Emerson and Thoreau, beloved authors read and absorbed by artists, critics, and collectors of the period. It may be going too far to suggest that both American and European artists, including Degas, were reading off the same page in terms of a common philosophic or spiritual zeitgeist, although Poe had certainly been an early influence in European artistic circles, and Emerson was widely read by the 1880s on both sides of the Atlantic—yet Whistler, time and again, seems to come to the fore in uniting the international art world under his banner. This was certainly the case as the more progressive and radical artists by the late 1890s were seeking new paths and more profound statements than the bright and charming uplands of Impressionism could provide. In addition to Whistler, J. Frank Currier had already, by the early 1880s, established an expressive Tonalist style that abjured Impressionism, as can be seen in his *Stormy Sky*, c. 1880s (fig. 110). Having been trained in the Munich school, Currier also shared with Degas a reverence for the old masters, both for tone and expressive facture. With the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886, Degas and his circle realized that the style, with a limited capacity to evolve in new directions, had run its course. Gauguin, a younger colleague of Degas, was well aware of these limitations and the temptations of superficiality the Impressionist art market engendered. As art historian Flemming Friborg has written, in an essay on Degas's monotypes: "Gauguin's skepticism is glaringly apparent in a letter to Pissarro, in which, as early as the summer of 1881, he fulminates over the many landscapes being produced and points out that Impressionism risks becoming a mass-produced commodity with a sham ideal of landscape at its core: 'Dammit, one cannot flood the place with rowboats and rowers and all corners of Chatou, that would be a horrible trademark.'" Friborg notes as well that Gauguin went on to produce grand Symbolist themes, while the more radical members of the Impressionist group were, even by 1880, casting about for more vital ways forward: "Already, this split was a hint of the deeper division between, on the one hand, a landscape painting based on the traditional mainstream of the genre, infused with a revival of the sensory, and, on the other, an art that longed for more than the merely visible. Degas seems to have taken a third route. . . . [His] fundamental viewpoint is that painting (and art in general) is artificial in the original sense of the word, a construction that should not be mistaken for reality. This has always been and will remain the problem for traditional painting."[45]

From this perspective, Degas fits the mold of a Tonalist artist to the letter. Degas's late Tonalist landscapes also help us to properly understand his roots in the old master colorist tradition of the Venetians, starting with Bellini and Titian, then Velázquez and Turner, until precisely aligning him in his own day with Edouard Manet, Camille Corot (whom he collected), Courbet, Whistler, late Monet, and some of the more unalloyed landscapes of Boudin. Like Whistler, Currier, and Henry Muhrman, Degas opted for an art of a single predominant tonality that stressed symbolic soft-edged features—whether landscape or the female body—and embraced a more abstract and mysterious essence, touching on what writers of the day often described as the "unseen." Degas's monotype landscapes of 1892 not only differentiate the artist from his fellow Impressionists but dramatically describe his evolutionary path as an artist departing—though *breaking away* would not be too strong a term—from classic Impressionism and joining his more progressive colleagues such as Monet, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec to stake out new post-Impressionist modes. The radical nature of Degas's late landscapes, especially his penchant for technical innovations and embrace of symbolic abstraction, aligns him with the Whistlerian Tonalist ethos (and its literary counterparts in Poe, Swinburne, Baudelaire, Proust, and like-minded Symbolist writers and critics) as it evolved on both sides of the Atlantic.

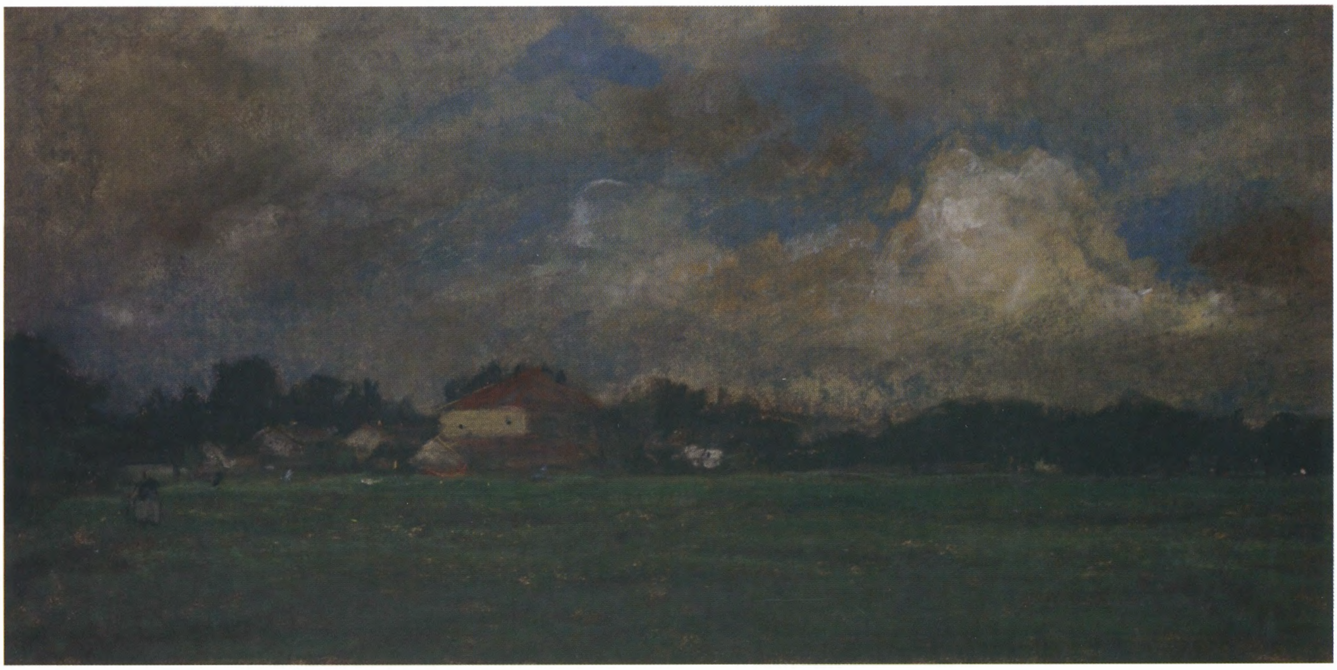


Fig. 110. J. Frank Currier, *Stormy Sky #7*, c. 1880s. Pastel, 8 x 15 in. Private collection.

It is telling that in 1893, when Whistler took over leadership of the radical British exhibiting group The International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers, the exhibitors included Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Redon, Vuillard, Monet, Manet, the American expatriate Henry Muhrman, and Degas (with six works)—all artists who adhered to the Whistlerian wing of modernism and generally eschewed Impressionism. From this vantage point, we discover surprising associations and correspondences, which may have less to do with direct influence and more with the underlying spiritual dynamic of turn-of-the-century Tonalism that impelled its strongest exponents to explore similar tenebrous styles of Symbolism and the like.

Muhrman's, *Boats at Kew*, exhibited at the path breaking 1913 Armory Show, perfectly exemplifies the continuity of the Whistlerian heritage in its depiction of Thames river barges being unloaded on the quay near Kew Bridge. The shadowy scene is full of mystery and the half-seen, of blurry figures and looming trees, apertures of reflected light aquiver in the dusk, and the sensuous arch of a Kew Bridge which seems to wrap its arms around the foreground in intimate embrace. A hushed moment in lee of time invoking the artist's own words: "When painting from Nature, sympathize with the mood she is in. Remember that the spirit is everything, and that even colour is only an auxiliary."[46] Thoughts that Degas would surely have admired as well.

Proust

There is probably no more telling example of the convergence of American Tonalism and European post-Impressionist styles and sensibilities than the case of Proust's adoption of two of the most important American artists of the day, Whistler and Alexander Harrison, as character models if not guiding spirits for his sprawling novel *Remembrance of Things Past*. I have spelled out much of the relationship between Proust and Harrison in chapter seven (see pp. 404–9) and elsewhere,[47] and noted above, in the third of the twelve characteristics of Tonalism, that Proust was drawn to symbolic visual cues in the landscape to elucidate themes of memory, many triggering intense cathartic epiphanies. Proust not only used Harrison as a model for one of his major characters, the artist Elstir (and Whistler to a lesser degree), he also embraced both artists' creative philosophy, even to the point of evolving his prose style along their suggestive Tonalist lines. Drawing on the paintings of Harrison (see his *Olive Trees*, fig. 28) and Whistler, and often employing metaphors touching on artistic practice, Proust's narrative is filled with subjective descriptions of landscapes and seascapes, which tend to the lush and dreamy as the author lovingly details aspects of changing color and light and the metamorphosis that takes place in nature over the course of the hours and seasons. Proust returns time and again to specific places and features in the landscape (hawthorns, steeples, trees, rivers, meadows, and flowers) as he explores the most intimate modalities of time and memory.

I was originally dumbfounded by this discovery, because it solved a mystery that had plagued me years ago when I first read Proust: How was it that the author's descriptive, painterly prose of place—poetic, memory-filled, mysterious, full of ambiguous shadings and shadows and haunting natural and man-made symbols—reminded me so vividly of Tonalist paintings by American artists? Not in my wildest dreams could I have imagined the direct links between author and artists. Proust's relationship, at an impressionable age, with Harrison

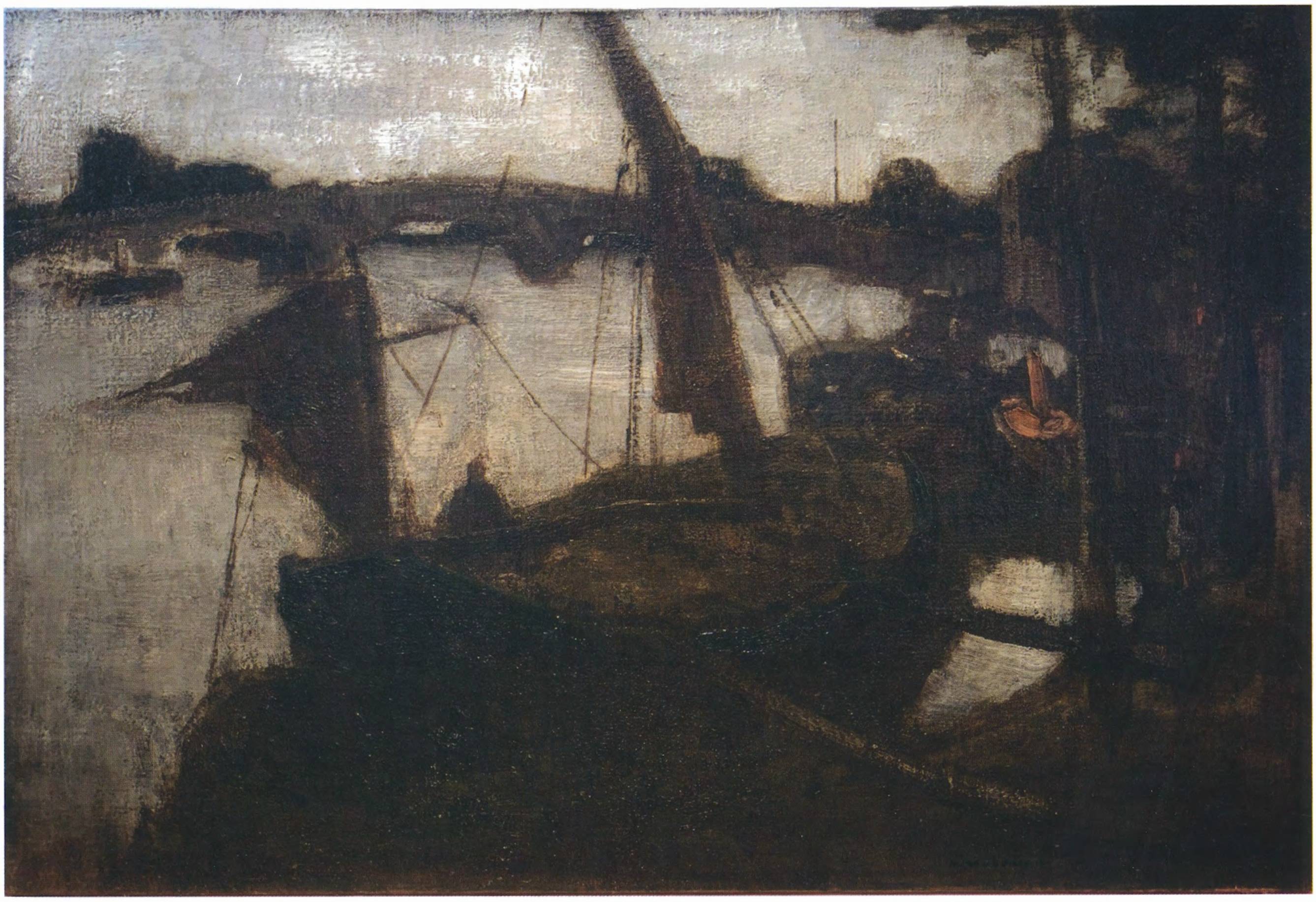


Fig. 111. Henry Murhman, *Boats at Kew*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Private collection.

in Brittany and his later intimate knowledge of Whistler's works—the novel specifically references Whistler and his artworks by the score—clearly colored the author's landscape descriptions (along with his character portraits, especially women), filtered as they are through retrospection and imagination, just as Harrison and Whistler, Poe *and* Degas had advocated as artistic strategies. Whether Proust knew of Degas's late Tonalist landscapes per se, or had viewed the monotypes exhibition of 1892, is unclear, but Degas scholars have certainly noted the similarities of artistic philosophy between Degas and Proust, especially the shared anthropocentric approach to landscape, in which humans could become identified with the landscapes they inhabited, while certain landscapes invoke a human presence, much as certain sacred places in mythology had become haunts of goddesses and demigods. Degas scholar Bernd Growe has explicitly noted such shared narrative proclivities in the artist and writer: "Thus [Degas] said of a block of granite: 'What a line, beautiful as a shoulder! I shall make a steep coast of it, seen from the open sea. . . .' It is in this sense that a reclining nude, perhaps a reversed print of Sleep, becomes an anthropomorphic coastal scene in *Coastal Landscape* [a monotype with pastel on colored paper]. . . . Landscape, as for Proust is, 'a mysterious person with the broad, undefined physiognomy of a cliff, the gaze of sunset in the rain, and even the deep waters of the sea.'"[48] As Growe notes, for Degas (and it is true also for Proust), what is experienced and what is invented, by virtue of metaphor and simile, became one and the same.

In similar manner, the artist character Elstir in Proust's novel is not simply a composite of Whistler and Harrison but an alter ego of the narrator, often commenting on the work and influence of Whistler and other artists but always gravitating to the centrality of Whistler's artistic ethos and role as trendsetter for fashionable society. Much of what Proust writes is a metaphor for something else, and throughout *Remembrance of Things Past* metaphors slip into similes and back again with seamless ease. His was an art of the senses, as opposed to ideas, a quintessentially Whistlerian proposition, where plot per se is secondary, and feeling, sensation, and pleasure become the author's goal. As no less an authority than Vladimir Nabokov has pointed out, Proust, like Whistler, used a single range of colors like a leitmotif throughout his masterwork's seven volumes to both project sensation and achieve a sort of organic unity: "This band of light (the color of heliotrope) was of a mauve color, the violet tint that runs through the whole book, the very color of time. The rose-purple mauve, a pinkish lilac, a violet flush, is linked in European literature with certain sophistications of the artistic temperament."[49] The appreciation of such telling details in a scene are often put into the mouths of other Proustian characters as well—here noted to the author/narrator by the baron Charlus: "To have known Whistler and not be schooled in taste, was all but unthinkable."[50]

Sadly, Whistler's stock as a fashionable artist would go into eclipse during the very years Proust was writing his novel, 1908–22; as with all things fashionable, the artist's artistic fortunes were vulnerable to the ravages of time. This sense of ephemerality pervades the novel with a melancholy refrain, as here, reflected in the despair of the artist Elstir (Whistler/Harrison) as he mourns the loss of an admirer:

> But more than this, with M. Verdurin he saw disappear the eyes, the brain, which had had the truest vision of his painting, in which, in the form of a cherished memory, his painting was to some extent inherent. No doubt young men had come along who also loved painting, but painting of another kind; they had not, like Swann, like M. Verdurin, received lessons in taste from Whistler, lessons in truth from Monet, lessons which alone would have qualified them to judge Elstir with justice. So the death of M. Verdurin left Elstir feeling lonelier, although they had not been on speaking terms for a great many years: it was for him as though a little of the beauty of his own work had been eclipsed, since there had perished a little of the universe's sum total of awareness of its special beauty.[51]

This was a poignant reality for Proust as well, since his success as a modernist writer, transcending the fashionable yet increasingly moribund drawing-room society of his youthful aspirations, required that he remove himself—for health reasons as well—from the very milieu that was his subject, in order to develop the ironic distance required to criticize the faltering fortunes of that very same society, of which he had once so desired to be a part. This remove, not unlike many of the strategies of the Tonalists enumerated above, allowed Proust to develop a prose perspective, part artifice of distance, part imaginative leap back in time, that allowed him to delve into the shadowy realms of memory and imagination while dissecting so vividly and with such devastating candor the foibles of fin de siècle Paris.

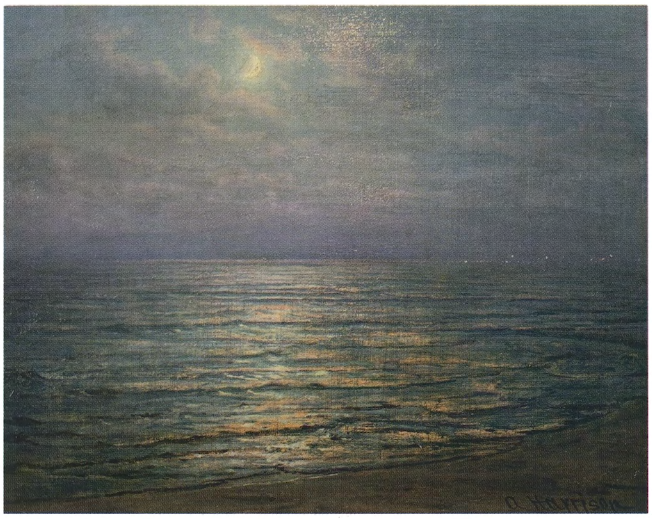


Fig. 112. Alexander Harrison, *Moonlit Sea*, c. 1900. Oil on panel, 12 x 16 in. Private Collection.

But more to the point, Proust's homage to Harrison and Whistler is best found in his descriptive prose, often mirroring the visual experience of a work of art, at times even referencing an artist and a specific artwork—as here, from the perspective of the young narrator ensconced in his hotel room at Balbec, overlooking the sea. (See Alexander Harrison, *Moonlit Sea*, c. 1900, fig. 112; and Whistler, figs. 103–5.)

> Sometimes the ocean filled almost the whole of my window, raised as it was by a band of sky edged at the top only by a line that was of the same blue as the sea, so that I supposed it be still sea, and the change in colour due only to some effect of lighting. Another day the sea was painted only in the lower part of the window, all the rest of which was filled with so many clouds, packed one against another in horizontal bands, that its panes seemed, by some premeditation or predilection on the part of the artist, to be presenting a "Cloud Study," while the fronts of the various bookcases showing similar clouds but in another part of the horizon and differently coloured by the light, appeared to be offering as it were the repetition—dear to certain contemporary masters—of one and the same effect caught at different hours but able now in the immobility of art to be seen altogether in a single room, drawn in pastel and mounted under glass. And sometimes to a sky and sea uniformly grey a touch of pink would be added with an exquisite delicacy, while a little butterfly that had gone to sleep at the foot of the window seemed to be appending with its wings at the corner of this "Harmony in Grey and Pink" in the Whistler manner the favourite signature of the Chelsea master. Then even the pink would vanish; there was nothing now left to look at.[52]

Such a homage to Whistler (a painterly description encompassing many of the twelve characteristics of Tonalism noted above), repeated in variations innumerable throughout the novel, almost to the point of refrain (as Poe would have it), demonstrates the power of Whistler's imagery and persona on Proust's writing, which, at its best, enfolds the reader in the very atmosphere of time, of a world palpably alive and resonating with visceral associations. Even by 1908, when Proust embarked on writing his novel, and Whistler's reputation as a sage of smart society was on the wane, Proust's admiration for Whistler remained undiminished, a vital force in his writing right to the end. Proust and Whistler had met only once, briefly, when Proust defended John Ruskin's writings on art—this after Whistler's famous court battle with Ruskin. The author had a copy of Whistler's *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* and kept a reproduction of Whistler's portrait of Thomas Carlyle in his sparsely decorated bedroom, where he could view it while working on his pages. On one occasion, Proust had taken a pair of gray gloves that Whistler had left behind at a party and

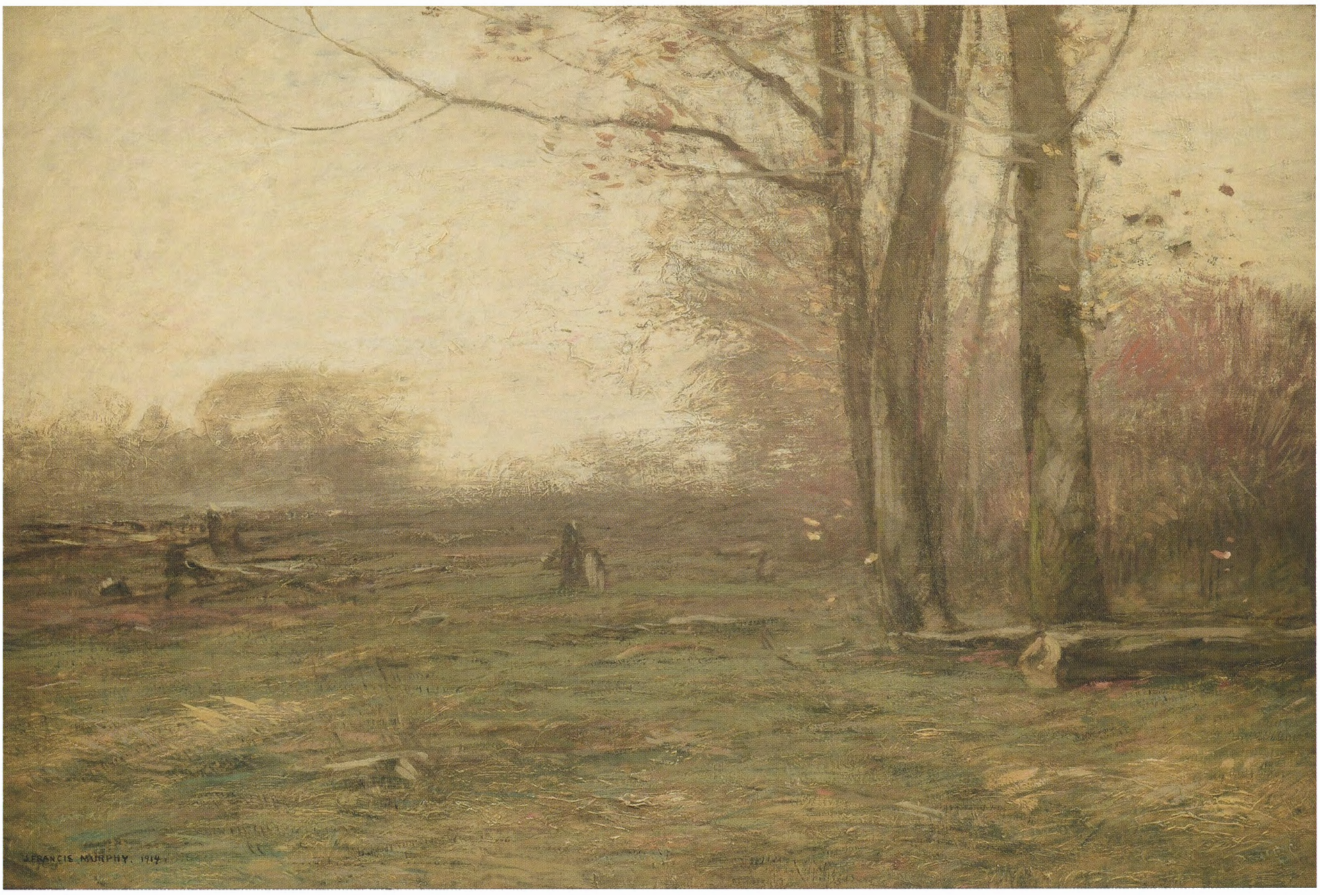

J.FRANCIS MURPHY. 1914.

Fig. 113. J. Francis Murphy, *Edge of a Clearing*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Private collection.

kept them as a memento of the master. Toward the end of his life, when he was a bed-bound insomniac with severe asthma, Proust struggled out one evening to view a Whistler retrospective in Paris, later writing in a letter: "If the man who painted those Venices in turquoise, those Amsterdams in topaz, those Brittanies in opal . . . and above all those sails at night belonging to Messrs Vanderbilt and Freer . . . is not a great painter, one can only think there never was one."[53]

It is hard to conceive another literary work that drew such inspiration from the life and creative culture of its day—especially paintings and painters—than Proust's masterpiece, which included its own epitaph to the enduring value of art as it infuses and enlarges the human spirit:

> But art, if it means awareness of our own life, means also awareness of the lives of other people—for style for the writer, no less than colour for the painter, is a question not of technique but of vision: it is the revelation, which by direct and conscious methods would be impossible, of the qualitative difference, the uniqueness of the fashion in which the world appears to each one of us, a difference which, if there were no art, would remain for ever the secret of every individual. Through art alone are we able to emerge from ourselves, to know what another person sees of a universe which is not the same as our own and of which, without art, the landscapes would remain as unknown to us as those that may exist on the moon. Thanks to art, instead of seeing one world only, our own, we see that world multiply itself and we have at our disposal as many worlds as there are original artists, worlds more different one from the other than those which revolve in infinite space, worlds which, centuries after the extinction of the fire from which their light first emanated, whether it is called Rembrandt or Vermeer, send us still each one its special radiance.[54]

In this inspiring light, I predict that as future scholarship in this arena unfolds, it will become even clearer that Tonalism, especially in its Whistlerian mode, can be better understood as the galvanic avatar to everything we now consider as modernism on both sides of the Atlantic. American Tonalism, in particular, especially vis-à-vis Impressionism, will finally be appreciated as this country's first radical, innovative, and indigenous artistic movement, a uniquely American contribution to the broad stream of creativity that fed directly into art of the Stieglitz circle and later Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting, invigorating postwar art in the hands of its finest practitioners, including Russell Chatham, Edwin Dickinson, Jon Schueler, Wolf Kahn, Jane Wilson, and legions of contemporary Tonalists: a proud birthright to inspire future generations of artists.

But perhaps as important, or even more important, as I look back on writing the *History of American Tonalism*, the culmination of an almost forty-year journey of discovery, is the sheer joy of uncovering these moving works by some of our greatest artists, because when we do, when we spend time with their paintings and watercolors, we are reaching back through time, we are reexperiencing their most precious moments. And as we do, they come alive to us; they reach out to us, and we to them, and all the years fall away. In doing so, we are one with them—touching hands across time, experiencing their joys and sorrows, like memory made visible—making them our own, so that in us they may live once more.

A late masterpiece by J. Francis Murphy, *Edge of a Clearing*, 1914 (fig. 113), painted on the brink of a catastrophic war that would change America and the world forever, touches just such a chord. In this work of soaring spirit and melancholy mixed, looking back to one cruel war while anticipating—at least for us—another, are all the radical technical advances of the Tonalist movement discussed in this introduction. Though, at first glance, a seemingly traditional image, drawing on the Transcendentalist truths espoused by Emerson and Thoreau, the painting embodies a vividness and force of personality that set a mark of abiding inspiration, if only in the sheer mastery of craft, for generations of artists to come.

NOTES

1 *Tonalism: Pathway from the Hudson River School to Modern Art*, exhibition at the New York State Museum, Albany, NY, Feb. 15 – Nov. 30, 2020; *Charles Harold Davis, Mystic Impressionist*, Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Connecticut, Sept. 26, 2015.

2 See for example John House, Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, and Jennifer Hardin, *Monet's London: Artists' Reflections on the Thames, 1859–1914* (St. Petersburg, FL: Museum of Fine Arts, 2005). Katharine Lockman et al., *Turner, Whistler, Monet* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004).

3 See Richard Kendall, *Degas Landscapes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); and Anne Dumas, Richard Kendall, Flemming Friborg, and Line Clauson Pedersen, *Edgar Degas: The Last Landscapes* (Merrell Publishers, 2006). These publications and exhibitions had escaped my attention when I wrote the first edition of this book.

4 *New York Tribune*, Jan. 29, 1890, p. 6.

5 Winner of the Webb Prize, Society of American Artists, 1893.

6 Ralcey Husted Bell, *Art Talks with Ranger* (New York, G.P. Putnam's & Sons, 1914), pp. 41–42.

7 Ibid., pp. 84 and 130.

8 Elliott Daingerfield, "J. Francis Murphy, Painter," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 61, Jan. 1917, p. 129.

9 Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1905, p. 9.

10 Society of American Artists, New York, 1901; Art Institute of Chicago, 1901; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1901; World's Fair, Saint Louis, 1904 (silver medal); Panama Pacific International Exposition, San Francisco, 1915.

11 *Willa Cather and Aestheticism: From Romanticism to Modernism*, edited by Sarah Cheney Watson and Ann Moseley (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), p. 100.

12 Willa Cather, *One of Ours* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1922), p. 353.

13 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 2, *Within a Budding Grove* (New York: Random House, 1981), pp. 772–73.

14 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 1, *Swann's Way* (New York: Random House, 1981), pp. 47–48.

15 Robert Richardson Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 285.

16 Henry Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, edited by Odell Shepard (New York: Dover, 1961), p. 156.

17 Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Apr. 16, 1916, p. 78, review of works of Charles Melville Dewey.

18 de Kay, *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1905, p. 9.

19 de Kay, *New York Times*, Apr. 16, 1916, p. 78.

20 *Washington Times*, Sept. 8, 1907, p. 23.

21 de Kay, *New York Times*, Apr. 16, 1916, p. 78.

22 [Charles de Kay?], *New York Times*, Mar. 7, 1902, p. 9.

23 de Kay, *New York Times*, Feb. 2, 1905, p 9.

24 Ibid.

25 Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Feb. 5, 1898, p. 18.

26 Bell, *Art Talks with Ranger*, p. 80.

27 Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 255.

28 Ibid., p. 333.

29 Murphy's *November Morning* was included in a 1921 memorial exhibition of the artist's work at the Lotus Club in New York.

30 Charles Colbert, *Haunted Visions: Spiritualism and American Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), p. 151.

31 *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Mar. 12, 1893, p. 4.

32 Formerly in the collection of the Cincinnati Museum of Art.

33 de Kay, *New York Times*, Apr. 16, 1916, p. 78.

34 Quoted in the *Washington Times*, Fri, Sept 3, 1909.

35 Elizabeth Pennell and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (London: William Heinemann, 1925), p. 46.

36 Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Tales and Poems with Selections from His Critical Writings* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1992), p. 981.

37 Ibid., p. 980.

38 Ibid., p. 981.

39 Leon Edel, *The Letters of Henry James*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 43.

40 Ezra Pound and John Pound, *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* (New York: New Directions, 1980) p. 1.

41 "Poe is a bad poet, a poor critic, and dreadful prose stylist in his celebrated tales. . . . Poe is not a paradox, but a tribute to the power of myth." Harold Bloom, *The Best Poems of the English Language* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2004), p. 517.

42 Kendall, *Degas Landscapes*, p. 212.

43 Ibid., p. 212.

44 Ibid., p. 226.

45 Dumas et al., *Degas: Landscapes*, p. 70.

46 Graham R. Tomson, "Henry Muhrman,"*The Scottish Art Review*, 1889, vol. 2, p. 37, 38.

47 David Adams Cleveland, "Landscape, Memory, Sensation," *The Magazine Antiques*, Jan.–Feb. 2013, pp. 142–49.

48 Bernd Growe, *Edgar Degas* (Taschen, 2001), p. 82.

49 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), p. 241.

50 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. 7, *Time Regained* (New York: Random House , 1981), p. 278.

51 Ibid., p. 117.

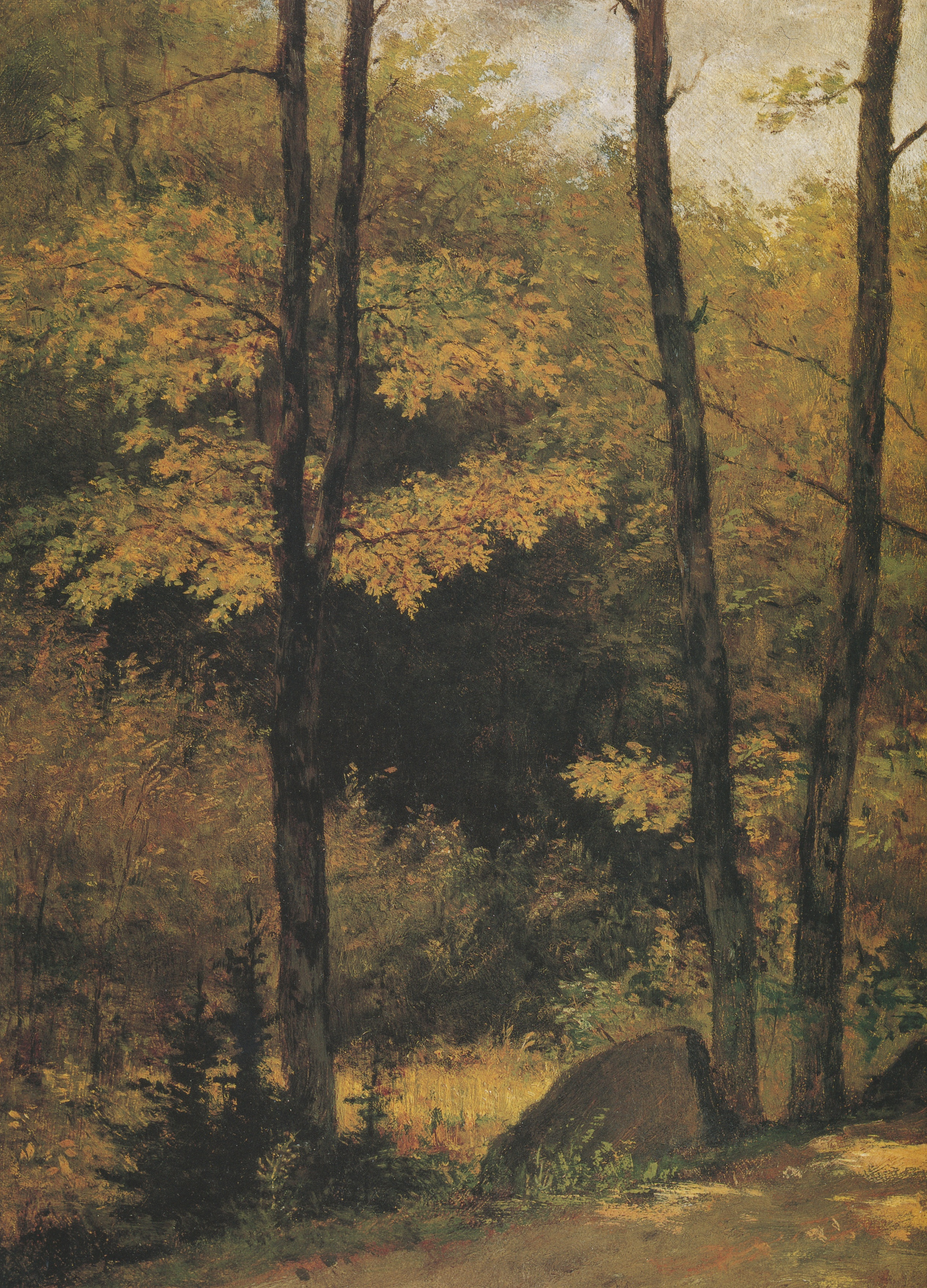
52 Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, p. 863.

53 William Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 395.

54 Proust, *Time Regained*, pp. 931–32.

A HISTORY OF AMERICAN TONALISM 1880–1920

CRUCIBLE OF AMERICAN MODERNISM



CHAPTER ONE

The New England Mind: William Morris Hunt, John La Farge, and the Barbizon Influence

The production of a work of art throws a light upon the mystery of humanity. A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature... A leaf, a sun-beam, a landscape, the ocean, make an analogous impression on the mind...The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce. Thus is Art, a nature passed through the alembic of man. Thus in art, does nature work through the will of man filled with the beauty of her first works. The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, 1836[1]

William Morris Hunt (1824–79): Early Years in Boston and Europe and the Search for an Elusive American Style and Subject

Casting back in time to seek the origins of the Tonalist movement, perhaps no better date appears than 1843, when nineteen-year-old William Morris Hunt sailed for Europe with his widowed mother, older sister, and three younger brothers. His was a talented and well-respected family: Hunt's father had been a judge and a U.S. congressman from New Hampshire, his mother was an amateur painter, and his brother, Richard, would become one of America's most esteemed architects. The Hunts were seeking art, cultural savoir-faire, and the wonders of Western civilization, which only Europe could offer provincial Americans. William Morris Hunt was not the first New England native to make the trip to Europe to study art, and his pilgrimage would be reprised by thousands of artists in the ensuing decades—especially after the Civil War—but he was the first to bring back revolutionary ideas in art and propagate them across America. As he stood on the Boston docks about to embark on his journey, he was not entirely sure he would study art or become an artist. As a contemporary biographer of Hunt remarked: "The profession of an artist would not have been chosen for any educated American at that period."[2] And Hunt was an educated American—a Harvard man, although he had been expelled during his junior year. In Europe he settled on his natural métier by trial and error, as Emerson observed, to satisfy "the desire of beauty." The young Hunt had talent, certainly for sketching, and a love for music and the outdoors, but more important, he had what was then called an artistic temperament: an instinctive feeling for what was alive and life-giving. This (which may partly explain his expulsion from Harvard—being "too fond of amusement") and his gift for inspiring others were his chief strengths as an artist. Like his near-contemporaries Thoreau and Emerson—both on the cusp of literary prominence—Hunt would come to embody something of the old New England Puritan flame: that flickering glow of individual conscience and desire to be a light unto the world. What might have been abolitionist fervor in his contemporaries, or religious or Transcendentalist enthusiasms, was in Hunt a pure passion to articulate the beauties of everyday life, to get at the essence of things. Like his Harvard and Concord literary brethren, he aimed to reform the world in the light of American realities. But unlike Emerson and Thoreau, who could find what Europe had to teach America through easily accessible writings, Hunt had to be in Europe to see the art, experience the culture firsthand, and take what he needed from European masters. Crucial to his success, as it was for so many American artists who came after him, was Hunt's ability to balance European influence, academic tradition, and innovation against American values and homegrown sentiments. As will be seen repeatedly in the history of the Tonalist movement, this delicate balance of foreign influence and indigenous inspiration was key to a progressive and invigorated American art.

Along with Hunt, John La Farge, George Inness, and James McNeill Whistler were in the forefront of the first generation of Tonalist innovators born before 1840. All were much better artists than Hunt. La Farge was an exquisite polymath as an artist, Inness the greatest landscapist and spiritual poet, and Whistler the colossus, the cosmopolitan innovator who revolutionized the art world from the 1870s on. But Hunt by word and example set the stage: he created a taste for Barbizon-style, broadly painted yet intimate landscapes, first among the Boston elite in the 1850s, and then throughout America. He shifted the taste of a generation. As Boston was the Athens of America, the seedbed of the nation's literary, philosophical, and religious culture in the last half of the nineteenth century, so Hunt's art and teaching spread the Tonalist gospel far and wide. On his return to Boston in 1855 after studying with

OPPOSITE: William Morrißs Hunt. *Roadside Copse*, 1862 (detail of fig. 1.4).

Thomas Couture and Jean-François Millet, his dynamic and ceaseless proselytizing for modern French methods in art remained a steady galvanizing force even after his untimely death in 1879. His *Talks on Art* of 1878, in which he virtually channeled Emersonian ideas into an artistic philosophy, became an inspirational guidebook and lingua franca for many important artists. At the heart of Hunt's message was New England's earnest hope to rekindle the old spiritual fervor in new guise; it was Emerson and Thoreau—a way of seeing—embodied in a painterly style that stressed emotional carrying power and individual feeling above all. By the 1880s, this new mode laid the groundwork of a distinctive American style: Tonalism. It was this zest for vivid form and color that led Hunt to embrace first the technical bravura of Couture, then the spiritual commitment of Millet.

After a tour of the major cities of Europe in 1843, a stay in Rome working with a sculptor, and a nine-month stint in Düsseldorf (source of the detailed and pedantic style that infected many Hudson River painters), which he found particularly stifling, Hunt discovered the painter and teacher Thomas Couture (1815–79). Walking the streets of Paris, he chanced upon a painting by Couture in a shop window and exclaimed, "If that is painting, I am a painter!"[3] And so began a period of study with Couture in which pupil and teacher became great friends. Hunt never lost his early enthusiasm for sculpture and Couture's emphasis on mass and form was congenial to Hunt's feeling for plasticity and sensuous contours. Much of Couture's teaching was based on his respect for Venetian High Renaissance painting, particularly Bellini and Giorgione, with their rich color harmonies and glazed surfaces, sfumato, and blurred edges. Couture, though very much the academic history painter, had forsaken his early training, which emphasized Ingres's traditional use of line to create "ideal" form in figure painting, for a more romantic and color-imbued style, stressing natural values and composing with form, mass, and rich color. What period artists referred to as Couture's "religion" of values demanded of his students an accurate rendition of values seen in natural light; these light and dark masses served as the blueprint for the composition, while eliminating inessential detail. Use of the ébauche, a small sketch laying in the tonal masses as a guide for a larger work, was central to Couture's approach. Couture's methods were a radical break with the established procedures of the Beaux-Arts tradition, especially the mechanical finish fetish of academic practice, and his students, who included Manet as well as Hunt, would take his technical innovations and extrapolate them to suit their personal styles, but applied to very different ends. Because of his rapid, painterly, and expressive style, and his practice of laying in dark and light masses in sepia washes—a system easily adopted by the neophyte painter—Couture attracted the lion's share of mid-century American art students. John La Farge studied with him briefly, and picked up more of his techniques from Hunt. The Tonalist floral painter Maria Oakley studied with Couture, while Albert Pinkham Ryder absorbed many of Couture's techniques by way of his New York colleagues. In effect, Hunt, from the outset had fixed on a progressive style, much of it based on the Venetian High Renaissance and the old-master tradition of Velásquez. Whistler, too, hitched his star to the same tradition, which by 1900 and thereafter would be recognized as Tonalism's bloodline.

If five years with Couture provided Hunt with innovative technical skills, it failed to provide him with the subject matter or visceral inspiration this son of New England required. The Barbizon painter Jean-François Millet did just that. Hunt was captivated by Millet; his humble lifestyle (which he so admired that he took to wearing wooden shoes, or sabots, and peasant attire) and earthy subject matter that resulted in big, powerful, and passionate expressions of the natural world and its denizens all rang true for Hunt. In Millet—so it seemed to Hunt—art, life, and spiritual expression had come together as one. Hunt worked with Millet between 1852 and 1854 and found in Millet's subject a nobility and moral purpose that had been lacking in Couture's grand historical themes. As might be expected, Couture disdained Hunt's infatuation with the downscale Millet. In Millet's paintings of laboring peasants Hunt detected a revolutionary impulse to champion the lot of the common man, perhaps touching on his inherent idealism as a democratic New England Yankee and abolitionist. For Hunt's generation of Boston's State Street upper class or Harvard's literary crowd nurtured on the classics, images of immemorial agrarian life sent shivers of nostalgia down the spine. Ironically, this love of rural values imbibed by way of Virgil, Ovid, and the Stoics, reached a crescendo after the Civil War precisely when agriculture in the Northeast was faltering with the expansion of industry in the region, ceding farming to the Midwest. The poignancy of a fading heritage stirred many New England hearts, and that of the painters who sought to capture it on canvas. Reproductions of Millet's famous image of the sower can still be found on New England walls to this day. Millet worked directly from nature to create his stirring imagery, unlike Couture who imposed an artistic structure on the seen and imagined world. Millet painted with great sincerity in broad and bold strokes, his flowing forms and masses of pigment conjuring the rhythms of nature and the very feel of the land. He rarely bothered with the half-tone glazes that Couture applied to contrast with the heavier impasto he preferred for light areas. Millet's art was one of nature depicted through a temperament. Or, as Hunt observed, "I took broader ideas of humanity, of the world, of life, when I came to know Millet and his work. His subjects were real people, who had work to do. If he painted a haystack it suggested life, animal as well as vegetable, and the life of man.

His fields were fields in which men and animals worked; where both lay down their lives; where the bones of animals were ground up to nourish the soil, and the endless turning of the wheel of existence went on."[4]

On the Edge of the Forest, circa 1853 (fig. 1.1), shows Hunt's profound debt to Millet. Although the subject, an intimate woodland interior near the village of Barbizon—at the edge of the Fontainebleau Forest, from which the style takes its name—includes a Millet-style peasant, here the figure and the cow are quietly poised in the shadows and so become one with the landscape. The figures are integral to the mood of the sunset scene along the edge of a forest. The use of a high horizon and the angle of vision emphasize the haunting tree forms and the patch of pale light on the horizon, and thus the atmospheric envelope around the figures. All is stillness. Figures and landscape elements are rendered in tonal masses that harmonize and unify the composition, intensifying the painting's abstract beauty. The work, absent the figures, could easily pass for a Tonalist landscape of the 1880s.

Tonalism and Barbizon Landscape Painting

Before taking up Hunt's return to Boston in 1855, it is worth pausing to briefly consider the role of the Barbizon landscape in the history of American Tonalism. As will be seen, the Americans of Hunt's generation like La Farge, Inness, Wyant, and Martin were inspired by the ideas behind Barbizon art, the depiction of the rural workaday landscape, its intimacy and informality, and aspects of the painterly style of Millet, Daugbigny, and Corot, but relatively little in terms of compositional formats—the residual staginess of the style, the dull brown tones (based on old master formulas) often employed as well as Barbizon's lingering narrative character and inclusion of figures (figs. 1.2 and 1.3). What distinguishes American Tonalism has more to do with its breaks—and innovations—with Barbizon tropes than with its borrowings.

When Hunt went to the French village of Barbizon to work with Millet in late 1852, Millet was struggling in the shadow of the conservative reaction following the European revolutions of 1848. He was out of favor and his naturalistic art was considered potentially inflammatory in some political circles. Millet's experience was typical of the ups and downs of French Barbizon landscape painting after the 1815 Restoration, as France went though the political upheavals of 1830, 1848, and 1870–71. The Barbizon type of landscape, which focuses primarily on contemporary rural scenery, filled with natural light, flora, and fauna, in which figures, if there are figures, play a secondary or a mostly decorative role, had a long history in France. Small scene paintings were avidly collected in the eighteenth century. Oil sketches and drawings of nature also had a long history in collecting circles, going back to Dutch seventeenth-century landscape art. In the early part of the nineteenth century, French painters made plein air studies but these were mostly for later use as aides-mémoire for larger and more finished works. In this respect some of Corot's early work of the 1820s done in the Roman Campagna with his bold laying in of forms and emphasis on topographical features is reminiscent of Tonalist landscapes of the 1890s, though the strong Italian sunlight is a far remove from the somber hues found in the work of Dwight Tryon and Robert Henri around 1900. Two critical issues or controversies plagued the Barbizon-School painters like Rousseau, Corot, Millet, Daubigny, and later the realist circle around Courbet: The first involved the acceptance by the official academic Salon system of naturalistic renditions of the French countryside shorn of outmoded references to historical or classical allusions. The second was the depiction in these landscapes of controversial subjects, usually peasants and the rural underclass, which offended the current political establishment because of the implied neglect or exploitation of these groups, or because it was considered inappropriate or low subject matter. Pure landscape, landscape without figures or ideological references, blatant or otherwise, to rural life remained a rarity in French art until the Impressionists.

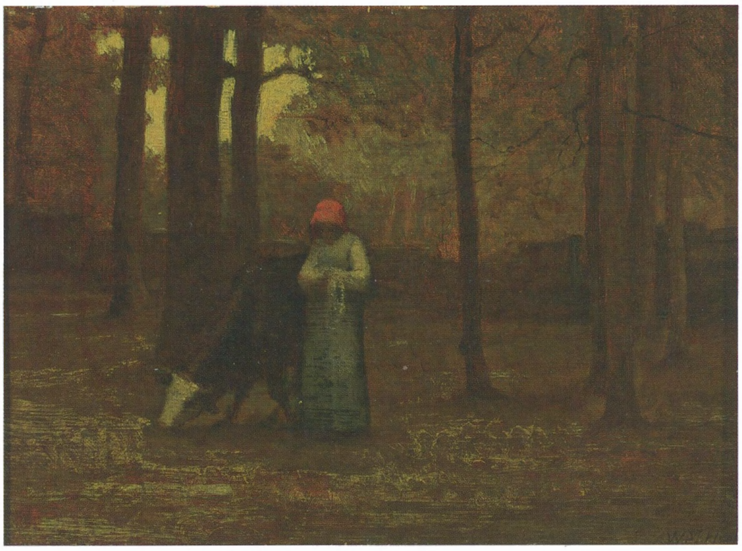


Fig. 1.1. William Morris Hunt, *On the Edge of the Forest*, c. 1853. Oil on panel, 7⅜ x 10⅞ in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Mrs. Edward Wheelwright, 13.466.

The politicization that constantly nagged at the evolution of the Barbizon landscape in the thirty or so years between 1830 and 1860 was an issue that American artists never faced on home ground where a native landscape tradition had deep democratic and emotional roots, and no academic or ideological bias. Partly this was because the Tonalist landscape was largely unpeopled by choice: in America, downtrodden farmers were unavailable or entirely uncongenial or simply beside the point as subject matter. Barbizon landscapes and later French Impressionist landscapes tended to retain figurative

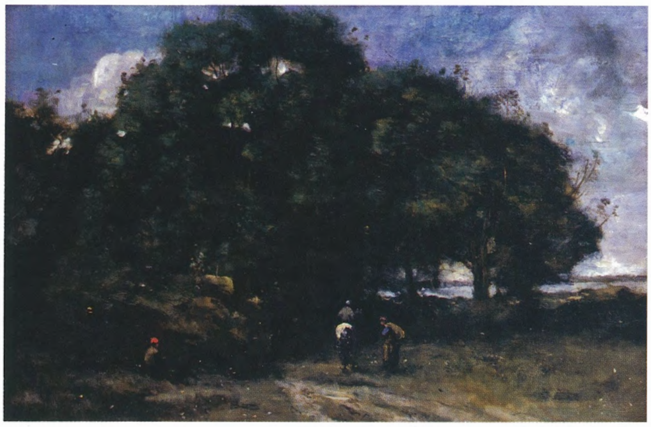


Fig. 1.2. Camille Corot, *Entrance to a Wood*, c. 1860–70. Oil on canvas, 14 x 21½ in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

and architectural elements. The French mind seemed inured to at least some narrative line—picturesque peasants at work, cattle and swine watering—either bowing to longstanding traditions from the genre's origin in academic history painting and the pastoral tradition, or because human associations and storytelling were demanded by the buying public, or as compositional adjuncts to add points of focus or notes of bright color. The love of pastoral and classical allusions never wholly deserted the Barbizon style. Again, this tradition, weak at its inception, fell away early in American Tonalist paintings, which found the figure in the landscape more often intrusive and distracting from the silence and purity demanded by Transcendentalist contemplation, perhaps a vestigial remnant of Puritan iconoclasm. Hunt, La Farge, Wyant, and Martin rarely employed figures in their American landscapes, while Inness, whose Swedenborgian beliefs made him partial to a human presence in the landscape, tended to include figures in many of his landscapes, but more as decorative, compositional, or spiritual adjuncts than subjects in themselves. Inness and his contemporaries preferred to imply rather than depict the civilized landscape; they were drawn to a rural scene shaped by human cultivation but rarely cared to narrate the actual work of rural life. American critics might argue issues of style and fitting subject matter in art, but seldom did ideological controversies of a political or class nature intrude themselves.

In France, politics and art were inextricably mixed. The "men of 1830"—as they were know to Hunt and La Farge (from July 1930 French Revolution had resulted in a more liberal and accepting atmosphere for the romantic spirit in French landscape)—followed by their Impressionist and Post-Impressionist compatriots, were constantly dogged by political controversy and the vagaries of public taste as interpreted by the critics and the official system of the Salons—the "art police"—so described by John La Farge, which retained enormous power to do good or ill to an artist's reputation. In America, the government was rarely, if ever, inclined to officially sanction art of any kind.

When American Tonalist painters, especially those who had studied in France, sought to analyze their pedigree, they certainly tipped their hats to the men of 1830, especially a revolutionary colorist like Delacroix, but just as often pointed out that the real origins of American Tonalism were to be found in the English school of landscape painting. The French-trained Birge Harrison vigorously insisted on this point in his enormously influential 1909 book on landscape painting: "Not until the early years of the nineteenth century, and then in far-away England, did the first true school of landscape make its appearance. A small group of painters, the best known of whom perhaps were Constable, Crome, and Bonington, went out into the fields, and brought back pictures which were the first true impressions of out-door nature ever placed upon canvas. Their achievement was unique. Indeed it was one of the most outstanding intellectual feats of all time... this little band of landscapists, with no artistic parents, with no predecessors to point out the way, suddenly evolved a totally new art out of thin air... They were the first to see and to record the pearly tones of out-door nature, and their technical bequest to posterity was an extended gamut of grays and mauves and lilacs which remain upon the artist's palette to the present day."[5]

Harrison was quite convinced that the Barbizon School would not have evolved as it did without the influence of these English painters. Constable made extraordinary advances with his studies of sky and clouds, ethereal forms pulsating with dappled light. In his rural landscapes, he employed vibrant flecked brushwork that caught the moist luminosity of hour and season, bathing his scenes in an overall atmospheric unity. Only Turner had achieved anything like it before. Constable had observed most succinctly: "Painting is for me but another word for feeling." Richard Parkes Bonington and Constable won gold medals at the Salon of 1824 and even though French critics were uneasy about the unidealized subjects, they admired the naturalism, especially the way in which Constable worked from experience rather than pictorial tradition. This English injection of romantic naturalism into French landscape turned the form toward a more passionate adherence to truth, simplicity, and purity, and to an art extolling the timeless virtues of the rural world in the face of growing industrialization and urban congestion. Corot and Rousseau were familiar with Constable's work and in time a new intuitive spirit began to infuse their painting. This was a more democratic art, expressive of individual personality and feeling—embedded in the tiniest rhythm and flick of pigment.

The Barbizon painters developed various idiosyncratic styles in the 1830s. The artists adopted more painterly methods, sometimes broad and sometimes rough, but in each case the application of pigment displayed their individual approaches. The rhetoric of academic painting and historical stylization was abandoned along with the clichéd subject matter. Rural and

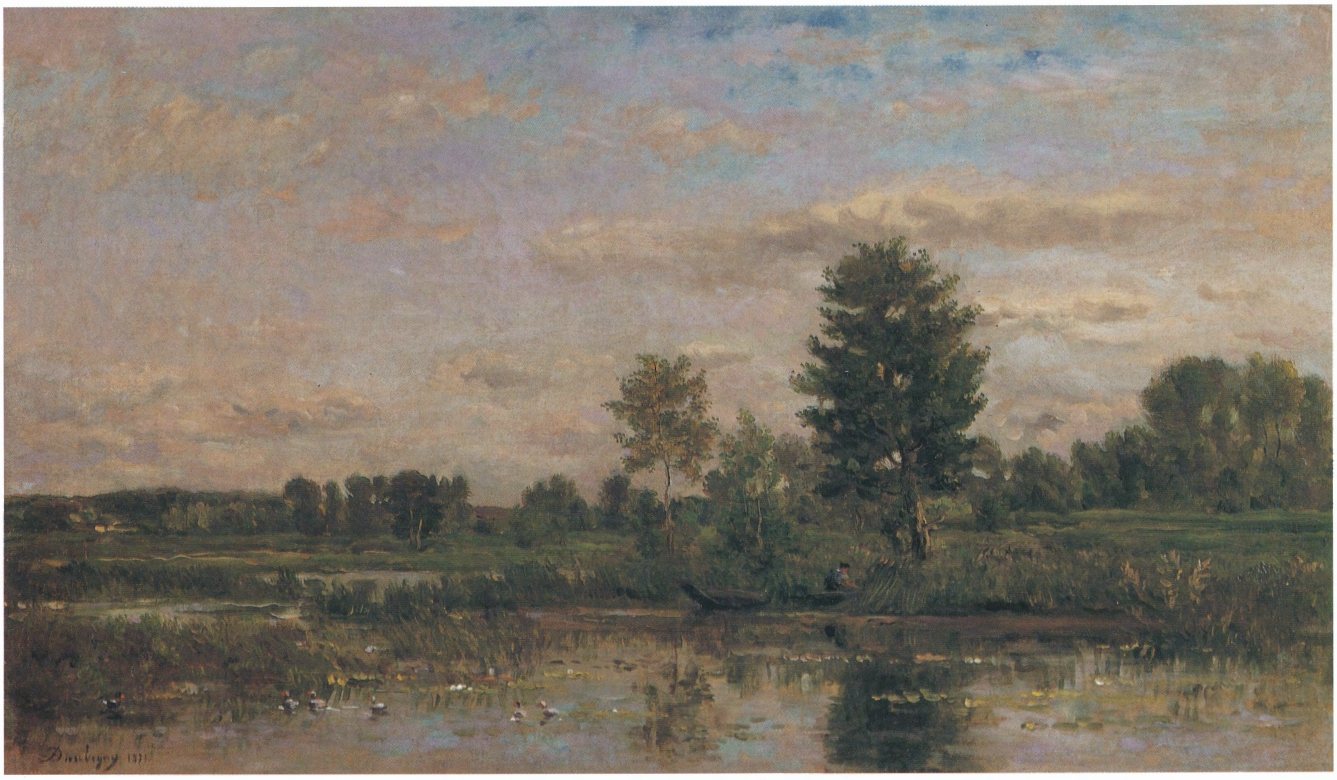


Fig. 1.3. Charles-François Daubigny, *La Barque au Bord de la Rivière*, 1871. Oil on panel, 13½ x 23 in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

woodland scenes closer to home became the preferred subjects and critics began to note the success of the painters in depicting nature with truth and informality. More controversial was the Barbizon painters' departure from academic practice in terms of well-finished execution. The expressive facture and the sacrifice of specific detail for more generalized effects did not sit well with the French art establishment. This kind of gestural use of pigment was something that Hunt picked up from Millet and it would pass into the gene pool of Tonalism, as it would that of the Impressionists. Nevertheless, the Barbizon painters like Corot, Narcisse Diaz, and Rousseau were always inclined to a certain degree of staginess in their work, employing a central vignette around which a series of strategically deployed screens are placed, leading the eye past a tree in the middle distance to a watering cow and deftly placed rocks. This vestigial rhetoric of the Barbizon mode, a sort of *passage composé*, was another aspect rejected by the American Tonalists, especially the best artists who came under the influence of Whistlerian aestheticism and Japanese compositional strategies, and who early weaned themselves from this old-fashioned, old-master convention. Remnants of the European past, represented by peasants dressed in exotic garb and going about their labors, lingered in Barbizon paintings like a kind of residual race memory. It might be admired by Americans as quaint and charming, but rarely imitated on home ground. Scantily clad forest nymphs, woodcutters, or a fetching shepherdess only found their way sporadically into the Tonalist landscape, mostly the work of young Americans painting in Brittany and rural France. It was an affectation overly indulged and turned into saccharine cliché by expatriate artists in France, who made a good living producing their peasant concoctions for the upwardly mobile society back home; the best painters quickly jettisoned such tripe upon return to America. The rural past in America was seldom so remote, often only as long ago as the living memory of the artist, or perhaps his father or grandfather. The romantic impulse in Tonalist art was, therefore, less about a distant or mythic past—although the American Indian made a poignant, often wraith-like appearance in the landscapes of Ralph Albert Blakelock—and more of the moment, a moment saturated with veiled meaning and memory, intimated in old roads, tumbled fieldstone walls, and abandoned meadows encroached upon by second-growth forests. For Thoreau, the sunset, a favorite theme of the Tonalists, symbolized the wild and expansive unknown beyond the horizon. "Every sunset which I witness inspires me with the desire to go to a West as distant and as fair as that into which the sun goes down. He appears to migrate westward daily, and tempt us to follow him."[6]

Another technical issue that differentiates Barbizon and Tonalist landscapes was also noted by Birge Harrison in 1909: "The one weak spot in the technical armor of the Barbizon painters was their tenacity in clinging to the traditional recipe of the brown rub-in. And although this was allowed to dry thoroughly and was then completely painted over with pearly tones that were true to nature, the browns are now beginning to strike through to the surface—to the serious detriment of some of the finest pictures on earth."[7] The Tonalists used warm undertones to prepare their canvases, not brown, which was responsible for the darker old-master feel of many Barbizon landscapes. The Tonalist method of painting cool overtones over warm undertones produced a soft, opalescent, atmospheric, and vibrant sense of natural light. By the 1880s, the cool luminosity of the Tonalist landscape was a distinctive and recognizable characteristic of the style, and would not have been mistaken by anyone in the know for a French Barbizon landscape. As will be discussed in the following chapters, Barbizon may have set an example for the intimate domestic landscape embraced by the Tonalists, but the character and style of the Tonalist landscape represented a hybrid of Whistlerian aestheticism, Japanese design principles, Munich expressive facture, French academic polish, the atmospheric envelope made popular by Jules Bastien-Lepage, which the expatriate Americans incorporated into their work in Brittany—all combined with an indigenous romanticism influenced by the Transcendentalist tradition of Emerson and Thoreau.

From the perspective of 1908, John La Farge could look back on the Barbizon artists with pleasure and pride, relating the remark of his friend and teacher, William Morris Hunt, in 1868 upon the triumph of Rousseau and Corot and Millet in the International Exposition of that year, "Well, our men have won."[8] For La Farge, the apotheosis of the men of 1830, led by his personal hero, Delacroix, was the vindication of artists who demanded independence from official art, who thumbed their noses at the art police. "He [Delacroix] was passionately absorbed in one idea alone, the pursuit of art as a freedom from forms of intellectual slavery." La Farge admired Delacroix's pictures for "the expression of the mood . . . the realization of this personal expression."[9] In La Farge's view, the Barbizon school was less a style united by place and time, and more about a group of individuals struggling for independence and freedom from rigid and dead forms. "In the arts which most reflect the aspirations of men, there came, beside the expression of passion, of doubt, of interest in all forms of movement, a special admiration of what is outside of man's agonies and anxieties—the peace and beauty and harmony of nature. The melancholy born of failure in fitting the issues of the world to one's own desires turns naturally into the contemplation of that over which we have no control—that nature which continues undisturbed by the vicissitudes of man."[10] By writing in this way of the Barbizon landscapists, La Farge was reflecting his own feelings and that of many of his countrymen who felt a certain disillusionment with industrialization and urban growth, with a world under threat from rampant materialism. For the American Tonalists, the disaster of the Civil War would also provide its own melancholy disenchantment. It is the struggle for freedom and independence and depth of feeling marking the men of 1830 that most inspired La Farge and Hunt, so that the actual forms or formulas of the Barbizon artists were, in the end, secondary.

Of Millet, La Farge wrote of the artist's great emotion and noble sincerity and respect for poverty, a man haunted by the language of nature. He quoted a letter by Millet: "The calm and grandeur of the forest is so great that I feel as if I were afraid: I don't know what the trees say to each other, but they say something which we do not quite understand, because we do not speak the same language."[11] In terms of technical resources, La Farge, in retrospect, saw the Barbizon men as conservative revolutionaries, in a sense reviving older traditions of landscape from the Dutch and Venetian traditions, recovering the "real past," as opposed to the "narrower past just behind us. They saw the early Italians, they saw the evidences of tone. . . . They saw the formulae of Nature and not the formulae of composition. Our young men were revolutionists from being ultra-conservatives."[12] La Farge's own humble revolution, his innovative landscapes and still lifes of the 1860s, were also developed out of the "real past," the deep tradition of Western art, the worth of which exposure to Japanese prints had confirmed for him. La Farge firmly believed that the Barbizon School had revived the older dispensations of value and tone and brought them through the dark ages of mid-nineteenth-century painting. He, too, like Birge Harrison, noted the technical deficiencies of the Barbizon painters and how many of their paintings, even in his lifetime, had deteriorated as a result of faulty chemicals in the paints or overuse of bitumen.

By 1880, when the Tonalist movement was gaining momentum, French Barbizon painting was already regarded as a historical style, with a well-known look and iconography. First-generation Tonalists of the highest caliber like Hunt, La Farge, Inness, and Whistler (Winslow Homer, too, while a Realist, was early influenced by Barbizon painting) drew on the great strengths of Barbizon, its naturalism, freedom of form, and expressive feeling, but rarely replicated its already ossified formulas. Inness was probably the most influenced by Barbizon painters, especially during his years living in Medfield outside Boston from 1860 to 1863, but even Inness only borrowed technical resources, although more watering cattle and figures populate his paintings than the work of any other major Tonalist. The finest second-generation Tonalists (born between 1840 and 1865) working after 1880 had long been weaned from Barbizon formulas by the adoption of Whistlerian non-narrative aestheticism and abstract strategies derived from Japanese art. For the most part, Barbizon-style landscape painting in America from the 1870s on tends to be found in the work of the weakest, most imitative painters, and rarely in the production of the best and most original artists. The "recipes," as La Farge referred to the clichéd formulas of Barbizon, the motifs of grazing cows, rural laborers, and the like, lingered like vestigial ghosts in American Tonalism but largely disappeared by 1890.

By 1903, in a series of lectures on the Barbizon School, La Farge made it clear that the Tonalists had developed a very different style from the men of 1830. The Americans had "built a form of painting as absolutely different as it could possibly be; a thoroughly American system of painting; a representation of American light and air, of everything that makes the distinction; even the moral fiber and character of New England being depicted all through the picture, whether it be the rocks and the sea, or the men who hang about them."[13] La Farge knew of what he wrote better than any artist of his generation. Not only had he succeeded in his own right and long remained in the forefront of progressive developments in American art, but he had early steeped himself in the New England landscape and great New England men of letters of the day. The Transcendentalist tradition ran deep in his art. Perhaps the greatest irony surrounding the misidentification of Tonalism with Barbizon is that the associations—certainly in the public mind, and then in later scholarship—occurred around 1900 when the Tonalists had come into their own as a distinctly American school, when popular artists like Henry Ward Ranger (who was criticized by progressive critics for being imitative of Barbizon modes) became identified with a post-Barbizon style, and painting grounds he frequented like Old Lyme, Connecticut, began to be discussed in terms of *the* "American Barbizon," as some mostly second-tier Tonalists sought a measure of historical cachet by identifying themselves with the Barbizon tradition. This late identification of Tonalism with Barbizon—a marketing ploy of faux respectability, twenty years or so after its radical departure from prevailing modes in the late 1870s—stuck in the public imagination, and thus became an easy rhetorical target of dismissal when the Tonalists fell out of favor in the 1930s. As will be seen as we return to Hunt and explore the development of La Farge, Inness, Wyant, Martin, and others from the 1860s through 1890, their triumph in developing a distinctly American style of landscape was largely a rresult of the degree to which they managed to transcend and then evolve beyond the outmoded tropes of the Barbizon School.

Hunt Returns to Boston

> *We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure.*
>
> —Henry David Thoreau, *Walking*[14]

When Hunt returned to Boston in 1855, he began promoting the work of Millet and other Barbizon painters. It is worth noting that this occurred while these artists were still under the shadow of official disapproval in France, and years before the French Impressionists would flock to Barbizon in the mid-1860s. Hunt's infectious enthusiasm precipitated the boom in Millet, Corot, and other Barbizon painters in Boston and later New York, and formed the collecting habits of New England for two generations. Back in Boston, Hunt had to struggle with the same issues that plagued every returning American artist: what to paint, how to paint it, and how to avoid cloning European academic styles in American guise. The easy answer, certainly the most remunerative, was portraits. Hunt made his early reputation with portraits of Boston's leading families. Like so many American artists returning from training in Europe, portraiture and figurative painting provided both an income and demonstration of hard-won academic and artistic achievements gained abroad. Although sometimes a fine portraitist, Hunt could be diffident about portrait painting and when his heart was not in it—often the case—the results could be disappointing. In 1856, Hunt and his new wife, from a wealthy and well-connected Boston family, bought a house in Newport, Rhode Island, and set up an art school. His first students included the extraordinarily precocious John La Farge, who arrived in Newport in the spring of 1858, and later the young William and Henry James, the future philosopher-psychologist and novelist, who both considered an avoction as an artist early in life. The serene seaside landscapes and atmospheric microclimate around Newport, which provided such inspiration for La Farge's proto-modernist landscapes and still lifes of the early 1860s and 1870s, as will be discussed, seemed to have played little role in Hunt's early landscapes. It took him some time to shake off his European academic models. Hunt's few landscapes from the first years of his return and teaching in Newport are mostly derivative of Millet and contain typical Barbizon formulas in which sheep and shepherds and various figures play a prominent role. But like the best returning expatriates, Hunt's intuitive drives began to gain traction; slowly but surely he started moving away from the academic figurative tradition and toward subjects from the nearby landscape, more congenial to inspiration and deep feeling. By the early years of the Civil War, with the terrible death toll trickling in every day, a more mature, distinctly American style of landscape began to emerge in Hunt's art.

In the spring of 1862, Hunt moved from Newport and rented a farm near his mother's home in Milton outside of Boston. *Roadside Copse*, 1862 (fig. 1.4), was probably painted near Hunt's farm, perhaps inspired by the countryside along the road he would pass to his new studio in Roxbury and later Boston. A second daughter had been born to the Hunts that previous fall and perhaps, too, some of the family joy at the new arrival is reflected in this bucolic scene. The landscape marks a transitional phase between Hunt's early landscape *On the Edge of the Forest*, painted in France around 1853 under the influence of Millet, and his later landscapes of the 1870s

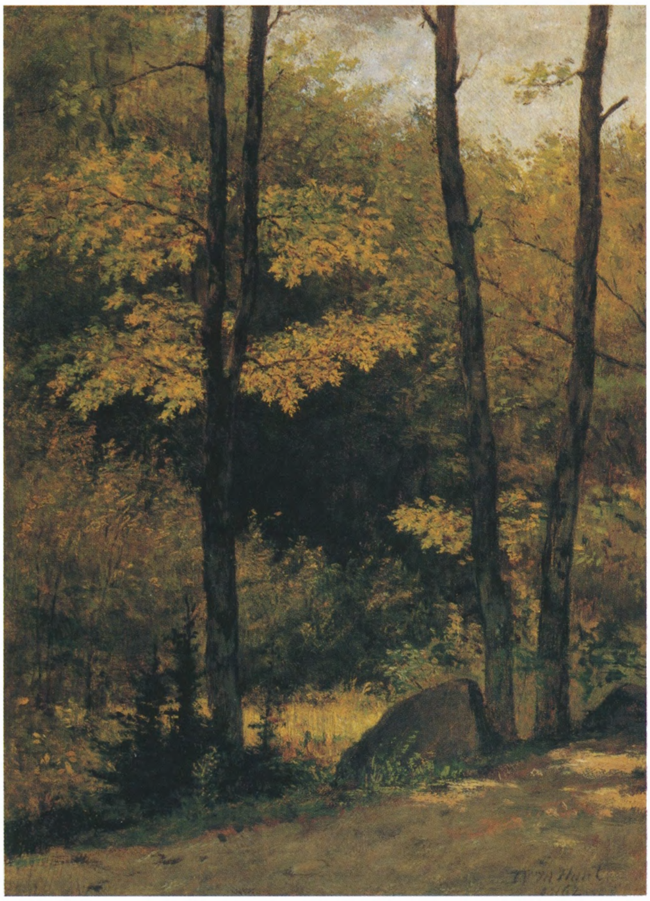


Fig. 1.4. William Morris Hunt, *Roadside Copse,* 1862. Oil on canvas, 15 x 12 in. Private collection.

with their broader, more expressive forms. In its emphasis on atmospheric outdoor light, *Roadside Copse* also dovetails with the early intimate landscapes of John La Farge painted in Newport from the early 1860s to the end of the decade. Hunt and La Farge must have been well aware of each other's work, first at Newport and later through the Boston milieu of studios and dealers they both frequented. Landscapes by Hunt from the 1860s appear to be quite rare, which may be because he painted few in the Civil War decade when his portraits were in great demand, and many may have been lost when his studio burned down in the disastrous Boston fire of 1872. *Roadside Copse* has a freshness of vision characteristic of new departures, even more remarkable given the pall of unsettling reports from the battlefront for the Union Army in 1862, and the Hunt family's fervent support for the abolitionist cause. Barbizon formulas and figurative motifs have been jettisoned. Couture's massing of forms is downplayed and Millet's grand passion for the rural world is here translated into a poetic informality. Details are only hinted at and leaf shapes suggested in the sun-dappled silhouettes against the darker background. Crucially, for the development of the Tonalist aesthetic, the scene is redolent of the domestic and civilized landscape, of a well-known stopping place along an accustomed route, full of feeling for the kind of exquisite beauty discovered near-at-hand, in the backyard, the habitual, and the routine. There is nothing of the grandiosity of the Hudson River School, very much in vogue in New York in the 1860s. Though domestic in feel, even naive, the composition is subtle and sophisticated. The angular thrust of the road from left to right and the vertical framing device of the three trees focus the viewer's attention on exquisite vignettes of filtered sunlight illuminating plants and tree branches. Like La Farge's Newport landscapes of this period, Hunt was already appropriating compositional strategies from Japanese woodblocks.

On May 6, 1862, Henry David Thoreau died in Concord just down the road from Hunt's farm in Milton. The poet, naturalist, and Transcendentalist avatar who, more than any other, inspired an entire generation of Tonalist painters, would have found Hunt's new intimacy of vision entirely congenial. Almost the last words Thoreau wrote in his journal, a year before his death, seem to have a bearing on Hunt's gestating enthusiasm for the nearby landscape. "Wherever men have lived there is a story to be told, and it depends chiefly on the storyteller or historian whether this is interesting or not. You are simply a witness on the stand to tell what you know about your neighbors and neighborhood."[15] Although Emerson was a more immediate influence on Hunt, Thoreau's writings by the 1870s may well have inspired Hunt's late expressive landscape style.

Throughout the 1860s, Hunt painted many Civil War portraits and related subjects. He also began working more in charcoal, a medium he enjoyed because its monochromatic tones made for harmonious compositions and gave a rich expressive contour to forms. His reputation as a teacher began to grow, even as he disappointed many students—most of whom were women—who sought more academic and technical training. By the standards of a literary community like Boston, Hunt was not a voracious reader, but he read a few authors intensely, Emerson being one of his favorites. He often scribbled quotes from Emerson in charcoal on his studio walls.[16] He probably also read Thoreau, whose popularity was growing astronomically in the 1870s. The influence of these Concord Transcendentalist and natural philosophers is found throughout Hunt's vastly influential *Talks on Art*, especially as Hunt became more and more interested in issues of perception, of the subjective impressions found in nature. In his classes Hunt always advised his students to seek out the general feeling of the scene they wished to depict. "The artist is an interpreter of nature. People learn to love nature through pictures.... You are to draw not reality, but the appearance of reality.... Get your impressions from nature ... and keep the first vivid impression! Add no detail that shall weaken it! Look for the big things!"[17] Color was secondary in Hunt's mind to getting the proportions right and the values—the masses of light and shade in proper harmony, along with the tonal transitions that give unity to the painting. In this, Hunt, a great admirer of Delacroix—as was

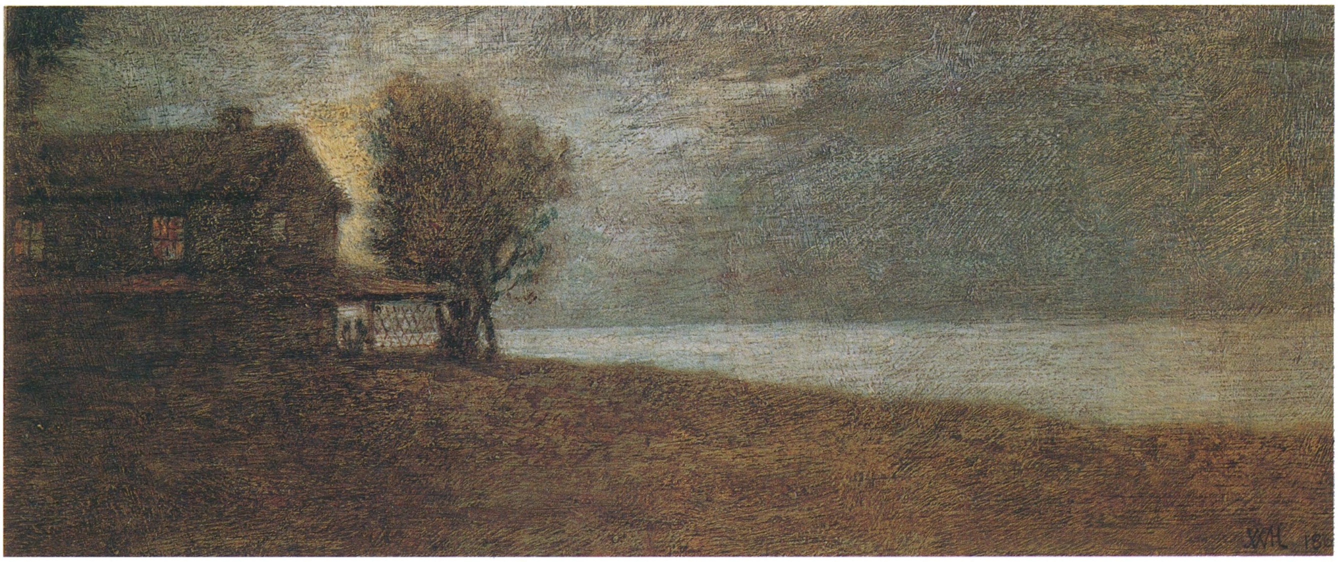


Fig. 1.5. William Morris Hunt, *Moonlit Shore*, 1864. Oil on board, 4 x 10 in. Private collection.

La Farge—followed the admonitions of the French artist as recorded in his journal: "When we cast our eyes on the objects about us, whether in a landscape or an interior, we observe a kind of binding-together of the objects which meet our sight; it is produced by the atmosphere which envelopes them and by the reflection of all kinds which cause each object to participate to a certain extent in a sort of general harmony… with many great colorists this quality is very often neglected, as result, certainly of deficient sentiment in this matter."[18] Like his reformist brethren in the Transcendentalist circles to which he belonged, Hunt was forever goading and criticizing himself and his students for the reticent New England Puritanism that held them back. "*Your* work is earnest, and *you* may be a little careless for awhile.… Conscientiousness and justice are stations which have been reached and passed before any fine work appears! They are almost material limits compared with the overflow that Art is!… If painters stopped at conscientiousness they would cheat the world out of half they have done."[19]

A beguiling and haunting moonlight landscape from 1864 demonstrates this subjective direction in Hunt's art. Areductive composition that in its simple arrangement of forms is a hair's breadth away from Milton Avery, *Moonlit Shore* (fig. 1.5) can be read instantly as land, sea, and sky under the light of the moon, or simply flat pigment masses laid one upon the other in horizontal bands, variations on gray and brown, verging on two dimensions. Only the house and tree anchor the perceptual reality and allow the dark pearly plane of sea to recede to the horizon. The paint is applied evenly in carefully modulated washes as if to make a display of the pictorial surface and challenge the eye to accept the illusion of three-dimensional space. One is hard-pressed to find precedents in the 1860s for such radical simplification touching on complete abstraction. Only John La Farge's landscapes of the same period, and Whistler's first revolutionary foray into evanescent abstraction in 1865 with his *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville* (see fig. 3.59) are more advanced. By the mid-1860s, the art of Hunt, La Farge, and Whistler was evolving in radical directions under the influence of Japanese prints. The stark native romanticism of Hunt's moonlit scene also presages the later work of American visionary romantics Ralph Albert Blakelock and Albert Pinkham Ryder.

Comfortable and accepted by Brahmin society, Hunt nevertheless played the eccentric radical in proper Boston, often wearing strange floppy hats and Finnish jackets with fur lining. The dashing and mercurial Hunt promoted advanced French paintings to Boston collectors and was involved in Boston's growing art institutions, including the Allston Society, the Boston Art Club, and the founding of the city's Museum of Fine Arts. He was a member of the exclusive Saturday Club, which included literary luminaries Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Henry James. The development in Hunt's art for feeling over form, subjectivity over objectivity, may well have been encouraged by associations with these Boston writers, especially Emerson and James, who were continually probing the intricacies of the subjective mind for the key to man's spiritual nature. Straddling the period's more progressive art world of Boston and the hidebound New York art scene—fixedly in thrall to the Hudson River School throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s—Hunt was constantly the object of negative critical opinion. He could certainly respond in kind and referred to his critics and the Hudson River painters as "those sun-dried remnants of American art, who, like scarecrows, remain in a cornfield even after the harvest is past."[20] Predictably, the New York critics wrote scathingly of his work when he exhibited at the National Academy exhibitions. Even the Boston critics, who loved a hometown boy made good in the romantic tradition of the city's own Washington Allston, could be biting at times; they regularly complained about the lack of finish in Hunt's paintings, a knee-jerk reactionary attachment to academic and Ruskinian ideals that still blinkered the stalwarts in Boston art circles. Hunt also had a cantankerous streak that did not help his cause with friends or foes. Much might be excused given that his entire professional life was consumed in an uphill battle against conservative tastes. But Hunt's insecurities in such a critical climate probably had more to do with his ongoing struggles to forge a personal style evocative of his homeland. A new patriotic fervor, first championed by Emerson and then others, began insisting on an American art no longer subservient to Old World beguilements. By the 1870s, even favorable critics were suggesting that Hunt needed to escape the shadow of his European mentors, somehow navigate between Couture's flat abstract forms and Millet's passionate advocacy for a humanistic art, and find his own way—an American way. Hunt, too, seemed well aware of his shortcoming along these lines: "We are all cursed by the nonsense of our early teachers. I took lessons, like the rest of you, with a pointed lead pencil and a measure; and to-day I feel the restraint which that way of beginning imposed upon me—so strong is the impression made by early lessons. We have all been taught by people who never did anything, never loved anything in the way of art. How can such people teach?"[21] It took a personal disaster for Hunt to make a determined break with his European influences: an event that released all his latent energy and expressive feeling for the landscape he loved.

Hunt's Late Landscape Paintings and Influence

Hunt's late landscapes are exemplars of the stylistic innovations the artist promoted in his widely influential *Art Talks*. In 1872, a disastrous fire that swept Boston destroyed his studio and decades of his work, including works by Millet he had put away for his posterity—a devastating loss for Hunt. In its aftermath, he seemed propelled to reinvent himself with a more broadly conceived and suggestive landscape style in which landmasses are dramatized with fluid and pronounced brushstrokes. Details are kept to a bare minimum and opalescent tones emphasized. The artist's love of charcoal sketching, especially the feathery evanescent tones and blurred edges he achieved in the medium, further enhanced this turn to landscape. Hunt traveled the countryside north of Boston in search of landscape material, even constructing a special horse-drawn studio van so he could move from place to place in search of subject matter. It was almost as if, late in life, he was in a rush to make up for the lost time he had spent dedicated to the academic figurative tradition of his training. Like almost every Tonalist who came after him, once Hunt had truly and completely embraced his native landscape, his art became a compelling projection of his deep-rooted feelings about place as a mystic current, a dynamic energy source. With the pressure of work and age on his shoulders, he devoted himself to the daring canvases of his last years and to the very thing he had preached to his classes: vivid compositions that "carry" with force and immediacy at a distance. "You want a picture to seize you as forcibly as if a man had seized you by the shoulder!"[22] Such carrying power and visual drama he had learned from Millet, although in the late landscapes the French painter's power was more internalized by Hunt and directed with greater circumspection and poetic insight. "Your work doesn't 'carry' across the room," Hunt would admonish his students. "It looks like nature when you come close to it; but it must look like nature as soon as you enter the door."[23]

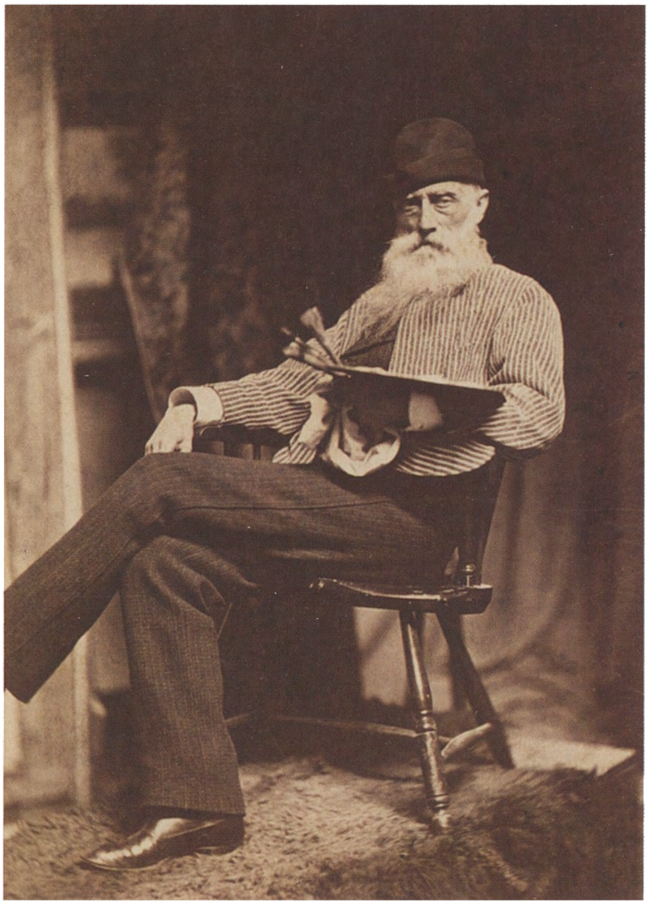


Fig. 1.6. Photograph of William Morris Hunt, photographed c. 1875. Archives of American Art.

If Hunt (fig. 1.6) had a weakness in his late landscapes it was a difficulty—a difficulty shared with almost all artists—of finding a way to keep the spontaneity and freedom of first inspiration at white heat, without losing the picture in working it up to a finish. Aware of this, he would preach to his students:

> In your sketches *keep the first vivid impression!* And no details that shall weaken it! Look first for the big things!

> 1st Proportions!
> 2nd Values—or masses of light and shade.
> 3rd Details that will not spoil the beginnings!
> . . . Strive for simplicity! Not complexity![24]

Summer Twilight, circa 1877 (fig. 1.7), is an excellent example of a more finished late landscape in which Hunt brings the shimmering spontaneity of his start through to a resplendent completion. Though a narrative element intrudes with the inclusion of swimmers, the focus is on the scintillating light effects of dusk and the multifaceted tonal harmonies and rich greens of the fore- and middle ground, directing the eye toward a wide horizon filled with broadly applied areas of paint. The composition has all the classic hallmarks of the Tonalist style that would take full shape in the 1880s. Mood saturates the scene. Evocations of Corot and probably Inness's work of the same period are apparent, especially in the presence of the figures. But the real subject for Hunt is atmosphere, light, air, and color. In a sale of Hunt's work in 1875, most of which were landscapes, the titles give an indication of the artist's preoccupation with atmospheric effects, the quality of natural light found at particular times of the day: *Summer Sunset, Spring Morning, Hazy Autumn Morning,* and *Storm*. The predominance of dawns and dusks, when shadows are paler, the colors cooler in value, toned or shaded down, points to Hunt's growing preference for an emotive landscape that emphasizes form and the arrangement of masses to create drama and harmony.

Hunt's last years were peripatetic and troubled as he struggled with critics and his own inner demons. He became estranged from his wife and family. Before his death in 1879, Hunt regularly traveled the North Shore countryside and coastline outside of Boston in his horse-drawn van converted to studio use. It allowed him to see much and capture in sketches the peculiar luminous quality of natural light, mostly at dawn and dusk, the time of day that so appealed to him in his last years—perhaps it was a reminder of his early days at Newport and the moist microclimate there that inspired the Tonalist visions of La Farge, and later Homer Dodge Martin and John Twachtman. His assistant noted how attuned he had become to eye-catching natural phenomena, and how in his last years inspiration and feeling played such a compelling role in his art. "His favorite expression, when he saw any sky or landscape-effect that particularly pleased him, was, 'I tell you, Carter, we ought to get a crack at that.'"[25] Hunt emphasized to his students that it is the artist's perception that counts, not simply a factual rendition of a place. "In poetry and painting, *facts do not amount to much*. Fact did not make Hamlet! . . . painting is not intended for rules; but to represent something which you see and feel! . . . Paint what you see and what you feel. . . . If you've forgotten the poetry and the mystery, you can't get it again. It's the way you

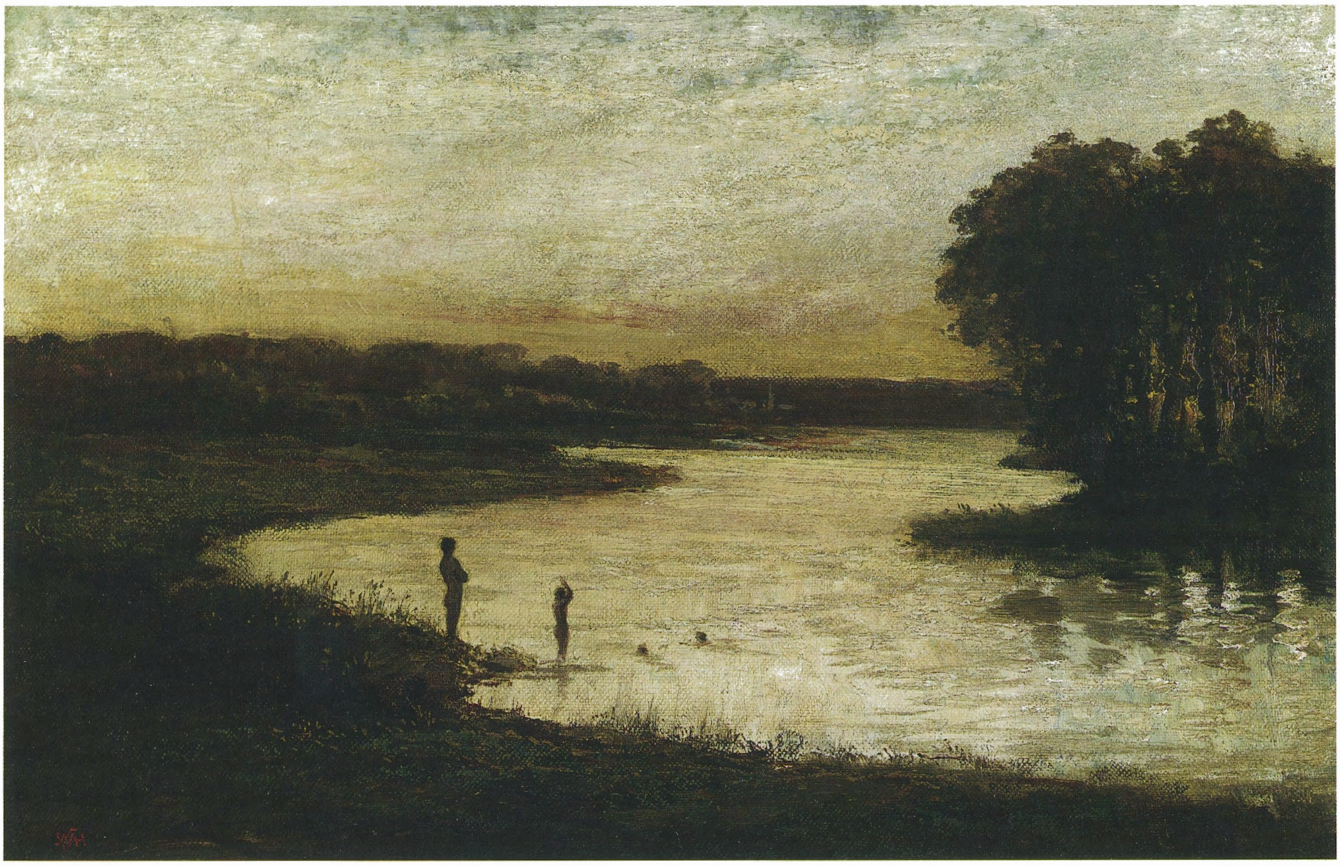


Fig. 1.7. William Morris Hunt, *Summer Twilight*, c. 1877. Oil on canvas, 25⅛ x 39⅛ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

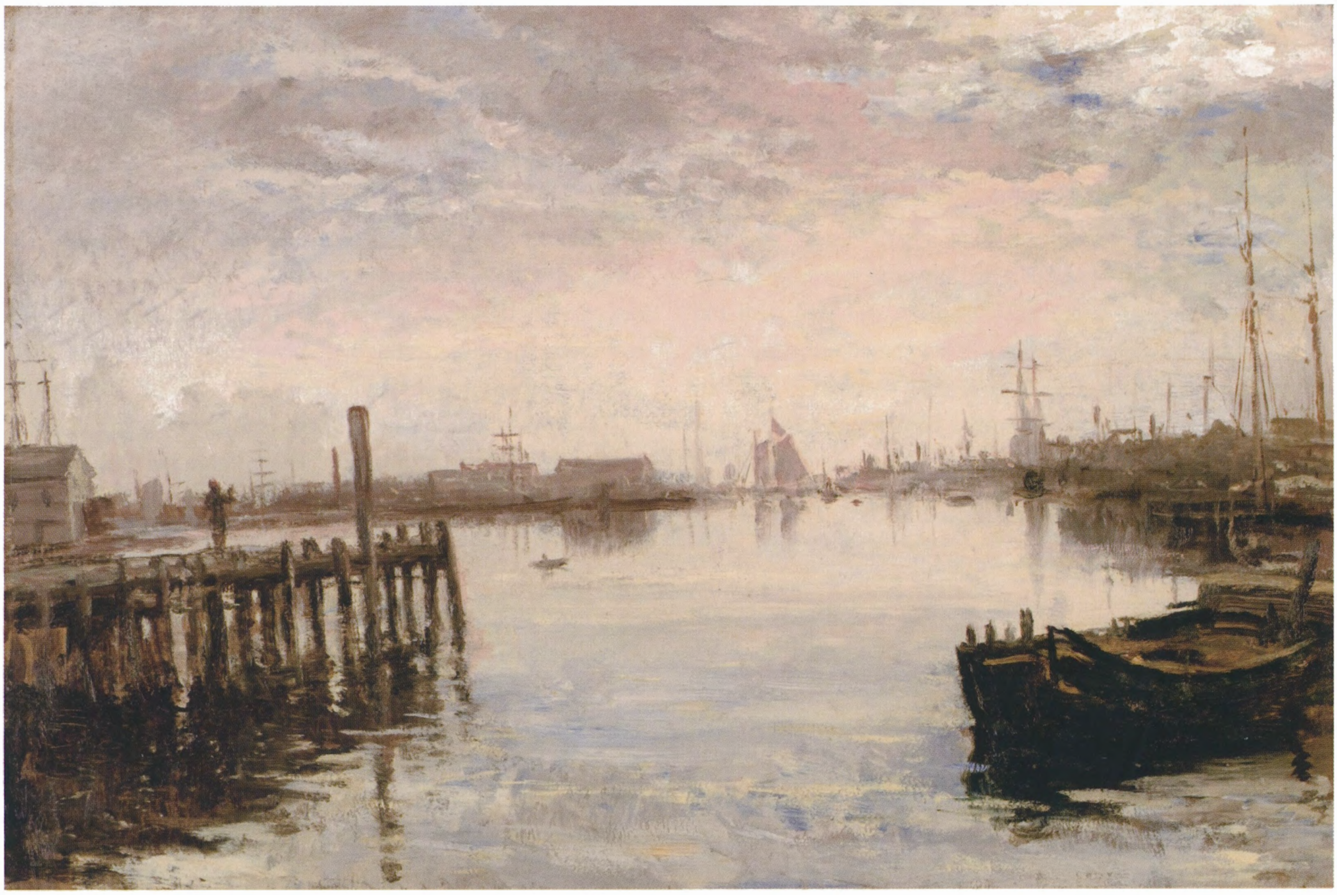


Fig. 1.8. William Morris Hunt, *Gloucester Harbor*, 1877. Oil on cradled panel, 21¼ x 31 in. Courtesy Brown and Corbin Fine Art.

look at a thing that makes the picture! It isn't paint, or the way in which the paint is put on!"[26] This was Emerson set to art.

Gloucester Harbor, 1877 (fig. 1.8), represents the apotheosis of Hunt's late style, in which he has managed to retain the sketchlike mode of a premier coup in an exquisitely finished work. The typical accoutrements of a harbor scene are transformed by the pearly atmosphere; the distant shapes of masts and sails have become blurred specters that barely deliquesce out of the humid sunset-softened air. The subject is not Gloucester Harbor as much as light and air and the artist's subjective response: the docks, barges, the distant harbor buildings are only props to enable the deciphering of natural light and provide context for the artist's mood. Monet's 1871 views of the Thames in fog are reprised by Hunt on home ground; not that he was imitating the French artist whose work he knew, simply that they were proceeding on parallel tracks. A looser, more sketchlike, and less successful version of Gloucester Harbor in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston attests to the difficulty and struggle Hunt endured to bring off finished masterpieces. He had something of a horror of "finish" in a picture, fearing that the completion might bury the original impulse, the instinct to beauty might be lost. Like the poet who keeps a notebook of inspired insights, Hunt advocated keeping many canvases on hand, of making many starts and sketches, which later might be rediscovered and the original impulse taken up again and turned into something magnificent. Hunt's near obsession with subjective insight, his constant sojourning in the countryside for inspiration in his final years bears an uncanny resemblance to Thoreau's concerted wanderings around Concord and his meticulous recording in his journals of perceptual epiphanies. "I would rather hear a single shrub oak leaf at the end of a wintry glade rustle of its own accord at my approach, than receive a shipload of stars and garters from the strange kings and people of the earth."[27] As Thoreau used his journal jottings to provide the inspiration for his full-blown essays and books, so Hunt used his small spontaneous studies as starts for his full-scale studio paintings—working desperately to keep the white heat of first inspiration. Often, it seems, the memory of first inspiration—working through memory—gave an artist's work a peculiar spiritual gloss that conveyed less of the moment and more of the timeless gravity of metamorphosis. "Some of the most vivid renderings of nature have been done after nature had passed."[28] This central lesson Hunt passed on to the generation of Tonalists that followed in his footsteps.

Toward the end of his life, Hunt had come to the conclusion that "atmosphere and light are the great things to work for in landscape painting.... Light radiates, and one must try to produce the appearance of radiation to get the highest effect."[29]

Unlike the Impressionists who had their first show together in 1874, Hunt was not as interested in a quasi-scientific or analytical dissection of light, or its transitory or momentary quality, as much as its emotional quality, the way certain effects of light impress themselves on the mind of the viewer. Hunt was after the sensation or mood the landscape engendered, which in memory or later recorded on canvas is removed from the flow of time, and thus is timeless. Hunt, like Thoreau, was in search of the timeless, not the transient. This distinction between the transient, scintillating momentary light of Impressionism and the timeless expressive light of Tonalism—the expression of the artist communicated in his work—remains Hunt's fundamental contribution to the history of Tonalism. From Hunt, La Farge, and Inness on, the Tonalists explored the spiritual qualities of natural light, plein air or in the studio, primarily as a means to the projection of an inner sensate light, whether of memory or nostalgia, or a quasi-religious or mystical sensibility approximating a pantheistic state of grace—merging the viewer with the thing viewed. Tonalist light in technique and execution celebrates the spirit of the artist; the gestural feel of the pigment conveys less a particular place and more the human emotion evoked by place and time.

Near the end of his life, critics, even in New York, were beginning to come around to Hunt's way of seeing things. Increasingly, the late landscapes were praised for their suggestive atmospheric quality and luminosity. A Boston critic of Hunt's 1877 studio exhibition wrote that the embedded emotion of the artist in the artwork was the real object, not the thing depicted. "This principle [Hunt's art and teaching] is that the mere surface and outline of things are neither what the eye sees nor the mind delights in. The association of ideas in the dullest soul and the imagination and feeling in nature of artistic sensibility give everything shape and significance differing from the bare actuality. The true artist is he who can reproduce nature *plus* man's fancies or feelings regarding it."[30] The sophistication of this Boston reviewer offers clues as to why in the 1870s Hunt, La Farge, and Inness were almost exclusively dependent on Boston galleries and collectors for sales.

In Hunt's last landscapes produced along the North Shore, the expressive and simplified carrying power, refined in his charcoal drawings, comes across with impressive power. *Seascape*, circa 1877 (fig. 1.9), is a stark and dramatic rendering of a rocky headland, presumably in moonlight. The jagged rocks and foaming waves clash with near-monochromatic intensity, not only endowing the scene with the beauty of opalescent reflected light but also conveying in the gestural brushstrokes artist's authority and passion for this stirring view. One can feel Hunt's urgency to get the raw energy of the moment and the sumptuous glow of moonlight on foaming waves. The energizing spirit of the moment has become his quarry. Clearly, the bold and dramatic landscapes of Hunt's last years had a profound influence on Homer, who would have known Hunt's work from his Boston studio or by way of the Boston dealer they shared, Doll & Richards. Homer's adoption of Barbizon naturalism in his early work and the grand designs and magnificent carrying power of his late seascapes—shaped by Japanese design principles employing flattened forms and sumptuous tonalities—all show Hunt's influence, whether by example or precepts disseminated in *Talks on Art*.[31]

By the end of his life, Hunt was beginning to get the full recognition that had been denied him for most of his career. His magnificent 1878 renditions of Niagara Falls prompted

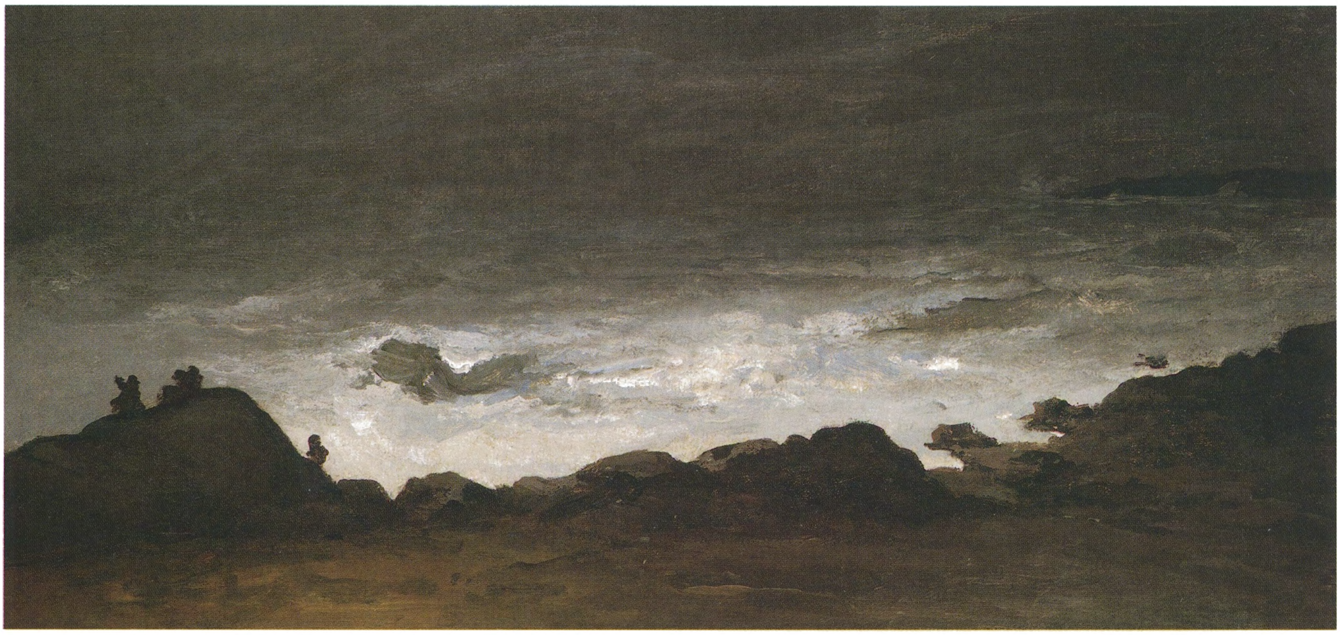


Fig. 1.9. William Morris Hunt, *Seascape*, c. 1877. Oil on canvas, 28 x 57 in. Harvard University Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum. Gift of Miss Pauline Shaw Fenno in memory of her mother, Pauline Shaw Fenno, 1956. 37.

much praise, even from New York critics. In 1878 he completed a mural project in the State Capitol at Albany, which also drew much praise, though subsequent problems with a leaking dome would cause it to be damaged, built over, and lost. Overwork, exhaustion, and personal issues and disappointments left his health in a precarious state and in 1879 he was found dead, floating in a reservoir on the Isle of Shoals, probably the result of a heart attack, which caused a fall and drowning, although the possibility of suicide persisted.

By 1880, at a memorial retrospective of his work at the just-opened Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, a new generation of New York critics led by the *New York Times'* Charles de Kay—who will figure throughout this history—had come around to his importance. "In landscape this artist was indeed great, if greatness consist in originality of conception, boldness and vitality in the execution. His own pictures, that is to say, those paintings in which he did not follow closely the methods and manners of foreign artists have an intensity and grasp that is, unfortunately, seldom seen in this country."[32]

Hunt had died at the very moment when the new Tonalist dispensation in landscapes was taking root in New York, promoted by progressives like the Munich-trained John Twachtman, Frank Currier, and William Merritt Chase, those returning expatriates from Paris and the American artist colonies in Brittany, and the radical indigenous artists like Inness and Ryder, Wyant and Martin. If he had lived another ten or fifteen years, his late landscape style would most likely have formed a centerpiece of the Tonalist movement, and he might well be remembered today as one of the greatest landscapists, in the company of Inness or La Farge.

Hunt and the Boston Art Tradition circa 1860 to 1880

No man can measure what a single hour with Nature may have contributed to the moulding of his mind. The Influence is self-renewing, and if for a long time it baffles expression by reason of its fineness, so much the better in the end. The soul is like a musical instrument: it is not enough that it be framed for the very most delicate vibration, but it must vibrate long and often before the fibres grow mellow to the finest waves of sympathy. I perceive that in the veery's caroling, the clover's scent, the glistening of the water, the waving wings of butterflies, the sunset tints, the floating clouds, there are attainable infinitely more subtile modulations of delight than I can yet reach the sensibility to discriminate, much less describe.

—Thomas Wentworth Higginson,
"The Procession of the Flowers," 1862[33]

Before examining the work of John La Farge, it is worth pausing to explore Hunt's influence on collecting tastes and the cultural milieu of Boston, Cambridge, and New England in general during the years after the Civil War. New England is at the heart of what made the Tonalist landscape. Something of the region's conflicted soul is epitomized in Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a battle-hardened soldier, abolitionist, and radical activist, who was also a superb naturalist, poet, and editor of Emily Dickinson's work, a man whose subjective—yet scientifically attuned—and spirit-filled descriptions of nature approached those of Thoreau. As the sophisticated, sometimes truth-obsessed, culture of New England formed the taste of the country in the last decades of the nineteenth century, so Boston's taste for intimate landscapes in the "French manner" ultimately guided the collecting habits of New York and then the nation. New York was the center of the progressive art world by 1880, but Boston was Tonalism's early redoubt, where the movement grew in strength and spiritual acumen. From 1855, when William Morris Hunt returned to Boston after his years studying with Couture and Millet, right through the year of his death in 1879 and well into the 1880s, Boston's dealers and collectors proved a haven and market for the most advanced landscape artists of the day. When New York was still under the sway of the Hudson River School, Boston collections began filling with Corot, Millet, Diaz, Rousseau, and other Barbizon landscapists. By developing a taste for the broadly expressive and painterly naturalism of the Barbizon School among Boston elites, Hunt fostered a market for his own work and that of fellow Tonalists John La Farge and George Inness. Without Boston's wealthy collectors, Inness and La Farge would have had a hard time surviving financially through the 1870s. Important Tonalists of the second generation like J. Francis Murphy and Charles Melville Dewey did brisk sales in Boston in the early 1880s. Hunt also encouraged the enormously gifted Boston-born Tonalist J. Frank Currier and the Deerfield, Massachusetts, painter George Fuller, who captured something of the uneasy spirit of New England in his hazy ethereal landscapes. All made important contributions to the Tonalist movement, as did later New Englanders Robert Swain Gifford, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Thomas Dewing, Dwight Tryon, Dennis Miller Bunker, John Appleton Brown, Charles Harold Davis, Hermann Dudley Murphy, and Arthur Wesley Dow. Many more New York Tonalists, set up summer studios in the Berkshires or in Connecticut's hills and coastal enclaves. Winslow Homer, who embraced much of the Tonalist aesthetic in the seascapes of his final years, was deeply influenced by Hunt and Barbizon art in mid-career. Tonalist progressives like Albert Pinkham Ryder from New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Robert Swain Gifford from nearby Naushon Island had certainly come into Hunt's orbit in their early years before moving to New York and becoming founding members of the progressive Society of American Artists. With Hunt's patronage some of the greatest artists of the day, like Frank Duveneck and Elihu Vedder, found early success in Boston. George Inness spent the Civil War years from 1860 to 1863 living just outside Boston in Medfield

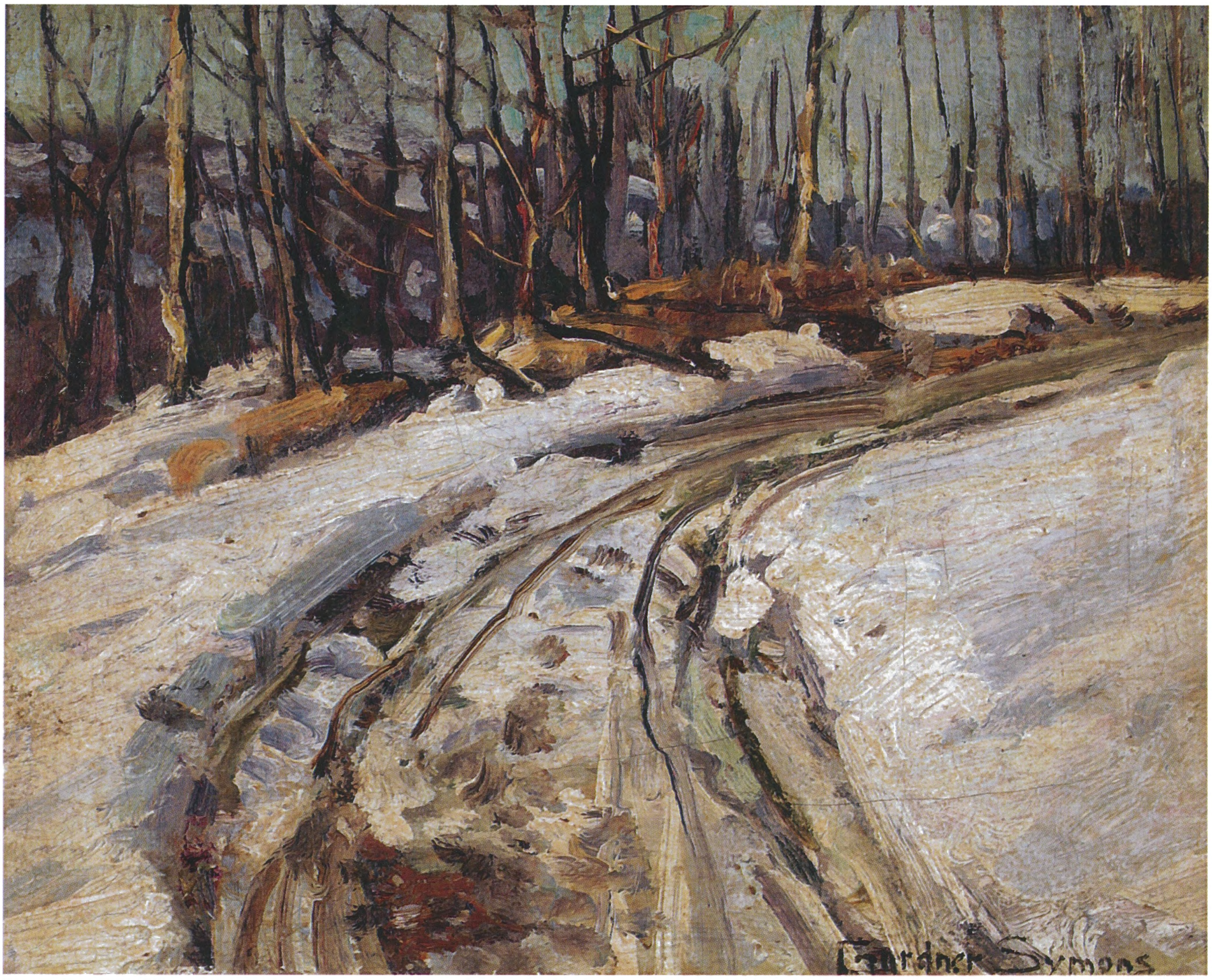


Fig.1.9.1. Gardner Symons, *Winter Woods Trail*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

and even kept a studio in Boston. Inness's exposure to Barbizon art in Boston in these years, and the advanced taste of Boston collectors cultivated by Hunt, produced a distinct change in Inness's style; his Medfield style was more broad and painterly and expressive, and set the mold for much of his late synthetic style of the 1880s. La Farge, though a New Yorker by upbringing, spent the seminal years of his career in Newport, Rhode Island, and also kept a studio in Boston. Throughout his long working life, Boston remained his main source of patronage; in the lean decades of the 1860s and 1870s, the only market for his easel paintings came through his Boston dealer. Later, in the 1880s and 1890s, La Farge's watercolors produced on his travels in Japan and the South Seas sold for high prices in Boston. Even the expatriate Whistler, born in Lowell, Massachusetts (which he always denied), expressed what critics have described as a puritan minimalism in his art, a kind of rarefied iconoclasm most apparent in the pared-down Tonalism of his Nocturnes. Something of his early New England upbringing lingered in Whistler's art for art's sake fervor.

In many respects, Tonalism *is* old New England. The seeming inherent contradiction in "old New England" forms the central paradox of the style. As will be seen, it was Tonalism's ability to be both progressive and traditional in an era of unparalleled change that forms the inner dynamic—the conflicted soul—of the aesthetic. Nowhere was this conflicted soul writ as large as in New England in the decades after the Civil War, especially in its financial and spiritual powerhouses of Boston and Cambridge, with Harvard's intelligentsia providing much of the academic heft, while Concord's nature poets, Emerson and Thoreau, provided an all embracing practical and self-reforming spirituality. Cambridge remained the literary mecca of America until it was superseded by New York in the early 1890s, when William Dean Howells moved to that city and, to contemporary eyes, brought the literary center of the country with him. Hunt and his students John La Farge and Henry and William James were deeply connected to this New England hotbed of intellectual ferment, even if La Farge was "old New York" and Henry James spent most of his life abroad. The

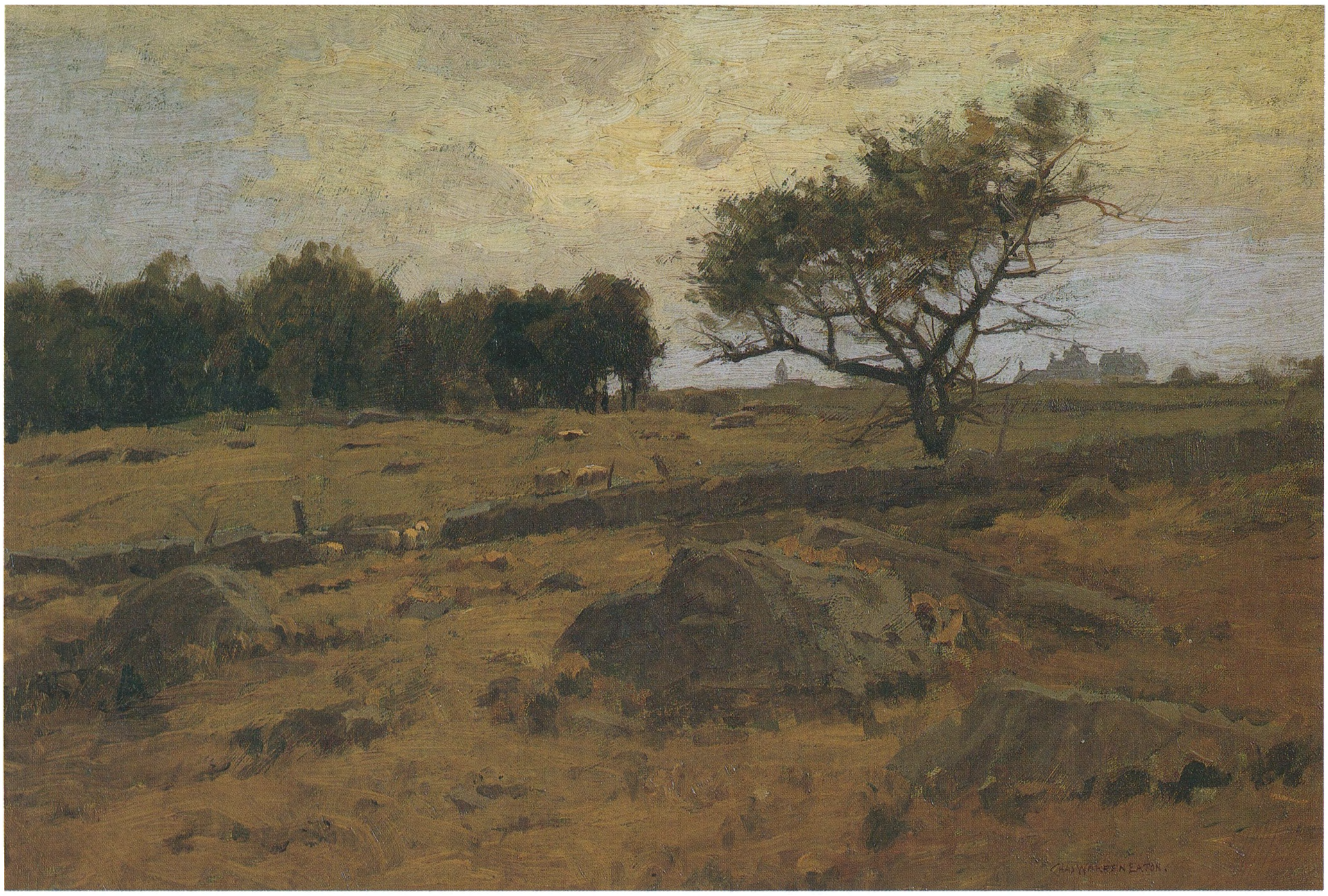


Fig.1.9.2. Charles Warren Eaton, *Near Thompson Connecticut,* c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Private collection.

post–Civil War New England soul was not just conflicted, it was confounded; its Puritan conscience had been trampled and transformed by war and uncertainties on all horizons. The region was split by multiple loyalties—to its hidebound past, to glittering Europe, to the railroading dynamic of the West—and its energy if not its prestige was draining away to New York and Chicago. The anxieties and ambivalences of the age were to be found in the work of scores of writers and artists of the postwar generation. The Puritan mind, rattled to its core, sought consolation in things artistic, a religion, in effect, with a decidedly mystical bent, for which the Tonalist landscape served as a kind of devotional object, an icon embodying both a progressive mind-set and nostalgia for a simpler past. As will be explored, the New England scene, the old roads and rundown homesteads, the ruined agrarian world of the Northeast, which appealed especially to Boston's urban elite, feature in the majority of Tonalist imagery. This was the imagery that Hunt began to be drawn to and feature in his landscapes of the 1870s, just when the full trauma, the deepest aftershocks, of the war began to sink in. But the essence of the Tonalist style has less to do with specific places and more to do with the questioning, sometimes melancholy, often nostalgic spirit that infused the imagery. This air of pensive wonderment is the quintessence of the New Englander; it galvanized the quest for a radical means of expression, for the joy that the New Englander believed lay at the heart of the human enterprise if only he could dig deep enough for its wellsprings.

The Civil War hit New England especially hard; even the abolitionists were aghast at the price paid for victory. The huge death toll, the dislocations, the lingering miseries of irreplaceable loss, and the existential questioning of traditional values changed the world as it had been. (The traumatic shock of that war to New England and the nation's spiritual and religious life will be examined more closely in chapter 7.) The cultural life of New England, too, was fundamentally changed by the war in the late 1860s and 1870s, and war and its aftershocks in turn molded the outlooks of artists like La Farge and Inness who had to negotiate the shifting tides of these unsettling years. The fragile emotional climate of the era infused their art with equal measures of foreboding and hope. As Van Wyck Brooks commented in his magisterial and aptly titled *New England: Indian Summer 1865–1916*, "The New England scene, in general, at the close of the war, was a battleground of permanence and change. The elements of change were appearing already, but the elements of permanence, also present, were as marked, if not equally striking. All that made New England, and was to make it, as long as New England endured, was sufficiently patent; but one had to seek it in devious ways, by a somewhat circuitous path, because the New England mind was shy. Bold enough, aggressively bold, in trade, in agitation, in religion, it was singularly delicate in essence; and this delicacy, the fruit of a long tradition of ethical culture, was more and more accentuated as the years went on. Change came over the world, and outward and material things swayed the human consciousness more and more; and then the New England mind retreated, withdrawing into itself. The esoteric note of the Concord authors, anomalous in earlier days, became, with Emily Dickinson, Henry Adams and many another writer, the note of the region. The Greek phrase 'Hide thy Life' was the motto of the later years."[34] As will be seen, the hidden life of New England entered fully into the Tonalist landscape, a life of contradiction, anxiety, ambiguity, and deep joy in the epiphanies of healing nature. Tonalism, like the poetry of Dickinson and Whitman, and the ghost stories of Henry James, provided the most felicitous and haunting sanctuaries for a tormented and confused age. It was an art that hid its tradition-bound yearning behind ways of seeing that were at once progressive and timeless, that made for a spiritual synthesis of time—past, present, and future. The Tonalist landscape is an icon of ecstatic time, of foundering memories, lost and found (figs. 1.0–1.5 and 1.7–1.11).

Henry Adams famously expressed his shock at returning to postwar Boston in 1868 after many years of serving as secretary to his father, the American ambassador to England during the Civil War. "Had there been Tyrian traders of the year B.C. 1000, landing from a gallery fresh from Gibraltar, they could hardly have been stranger on the shore of a world, so changed from what it had been ten years before."[35] It was not just the death of so many of his Harvard classmates in the war that affected Adams but the tenor of Boston and by extension the country. While the spiritual disaffection of postwar Boston was profound, the outward economic changes wrought by the war were literally emptying out the New England countryside as the young headed west for better prospects. Railroads were girdling the country; new factories were springing up in industrial centers, and vast immigrant populations were besieging the docks of Boston and New York, streaming outward to fill the expanding factories and mills. Boston was overwhelmed with the new arrivals from Ireland and Italy, along with Jews from Eastern Europe. In 1868 the Cunard Line shifted its European route from Boston to New York, further isolating Boston from the international arena. There was plenty of wealth in Boston, and plenty of old Boston money was invested in railroads and mill towns like Lowell and Lawrence, but the city's absolute position in terms of economic power, as well as its political influence on the national stage, was waning. Men like Henry Adams and Henry James turned up their noses at what they considered the corrupt politics of the age under

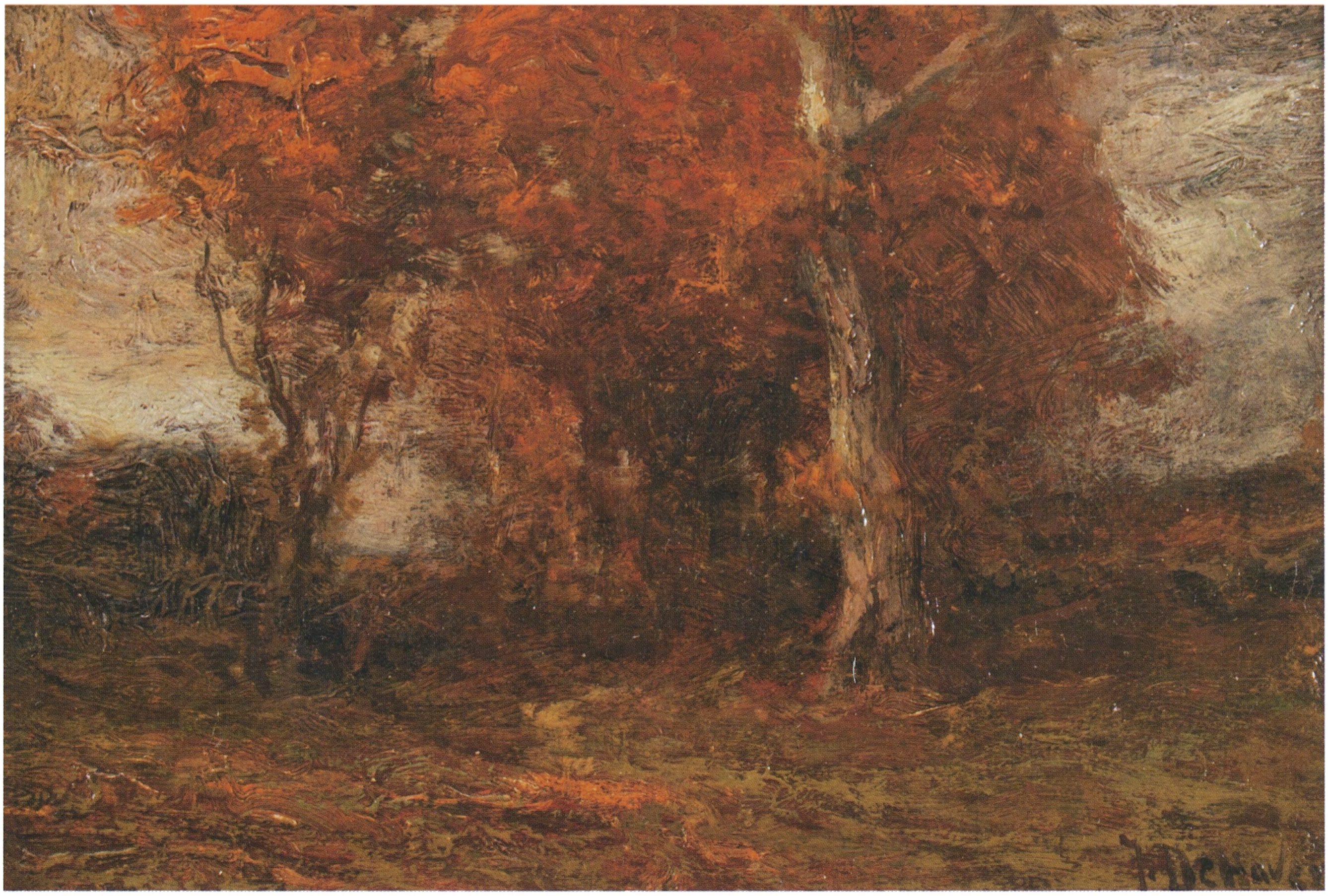


Fig. 1.10. Franklin De Haven, *Dusk Oaks*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 6 x 9 in. Private collection.

President Ulysses S. Grant, the western interests, and the vast new fortunes: wealth without taste or ethical benchmarks, wealth that ran after bigness and success and flashy fashions for their own sake. As Van Wyck Brooks observed, "The war had exhausted the nation, as even Emerson felt and said. The old idealism had been burnt away, the hopes of the patriot fathers, the youthful and generous dreams of the early republic. The war, with its fearful tension, draining the national vitality, had left the mind of the people morally flabby. The indifference to the public welfare was as marked as Henry Adams thought, and a low type of 'business ethics' prevailed over the old ethics, in a large and larger measure, as time went on."[36] New England's economy shifted and declined, and in its wake the small towns and villages emptied of young people. For many, the Yankee homeland became a melancholy and hopeless affair, "...a weather-worn house with a maiden aunt and rooms that ached with loneliness, a mass of tumbling wood or a brick-filled hollow where the lilacs bloomed in Maytime, where 'naught remained, the saddening tale to tale, Save life's last wrecks—the cellar and the well.' This world that was left behind, with its bramble-draped cellar-holes and dim trails leading through the woods, was to breed a peculiar miasma, as the years went on...."[37] It was estimated that there were fifty thousand "extra" women in Massachusetts alone, either war widows or young women whose lovers had failed to return from the war or moved West for better economic prospects. The abandoned homesteads of New England would prove the source of countless tales by local New England writers and those with wider reputations like Sarah Orne Jewett, and later, Edith Wharton and Robert Frost. These barren places became the focal point and emotional epicenter of the Tonalist landscape.

This mood, this lingering reminder of a lost and declining rural world, offers partial explanation of the temperament that engendered Boston's early enthusiasm for intimate painterly landscapes in a modern mode, by both French and American artists. Hunt himself had turned to the landscapes of Boston's North Shore, investing them with his own feelings of loss and decline and hope. For Hunt and his contemporaries, the landscape was not just about the picturesque but was an expression of life itself—the spirit life of nature, or in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's words, the "subtle modulations of delight." New England's cultural and intellectual upper class were weaned on the speculative writings of Emerson and Thoreau; nature was the repository of wonder, of metamorphosis without change—a timeless realm of fascination, of enduring joy and sorrow. And Darwin, as interpreted by Harvard professor John Fiske, instead of separating man from nature, only sealed the relationship; man became for many the central glory of creation, not its plaything or victim. New Englanders knew their natural history like their Bible—sometimes better. In fact, in its most private moments, the old religion of New England tended to a subjective mysticism, more animistic in feeling than pantheistic. And this was what the Tonalists painted; not only are their trees and grasses alive, but the rivers and rocks and the pulsing sunset skies, too.

But even this bond with the land did not save many in New England after 1865 from a love-hate relationship with their region and country. The American scene could be loved and disparaged almost in the same breath; it was parochial, backward, and for writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne thoroughly lacking in romance, "a country where there is no shadow, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land."[38] Members of the younger generation, who had taken the full brunt of the Civil War, became cynical; they lacked their fathers' lingering patriotic fervor for the old causes of American exceptionalism; they began to turn to Europe, especially England, in a yearning for the long-lingering colonial relationship and the reassurance of Old World culture, charm, and sophistication. Even in religion, many were abandoning the dowdy Congregationalist and Unitarian faiths for the high Episcopalian church, with its sensuous music, Gothic traceries, and incense-laden mysteries. For artists in particular this renewed fascination with the Old World was a double-edged sword: fascination with European fashion made the homegrown product more liable to being overlooked, or worse, entirely disregarded. London, Paris, Rome, and Venice beckoned many expatriate Bostonians, disillusioned with the new rapidly industrializing America of moneymaking and materialism. The novels of Henry James are full of such Bostonians, lingering in European watering places, slightly embarrassed if not disinterested in and disenchanted by their own country. So Corot's misty scaled-down landscapes, full of the immemorial grace of Europe, fitted both the melancholy mood and the chic townhouse drawing rooms of Boston's wealthy. This was the world in which Hunt prospered but which threatened to rob him and his followers of their vital roots in the region, the very emotional energy and inspiration that finally gave wing to Hunt's late landscapes.

What was true of Boston early—the split loyalty between America and Europe—became even more true of New York later, and it proved the great dilemma that plagued American writers and discouraged American artists in the decades before 1900. Few could resist the siren song of European sophistication that so stirred the hearts of those coming of age after the war. Besides the technical wherewithal of the academies there was the deeper mystery of time, the historical and philosophical grandeur of the great struggles of civilization—all that was missing in the glaring light of postwar America, so obsessed with material progress. Henry James, by and large, opted for the rare intimacies of mind found in his European settings, as

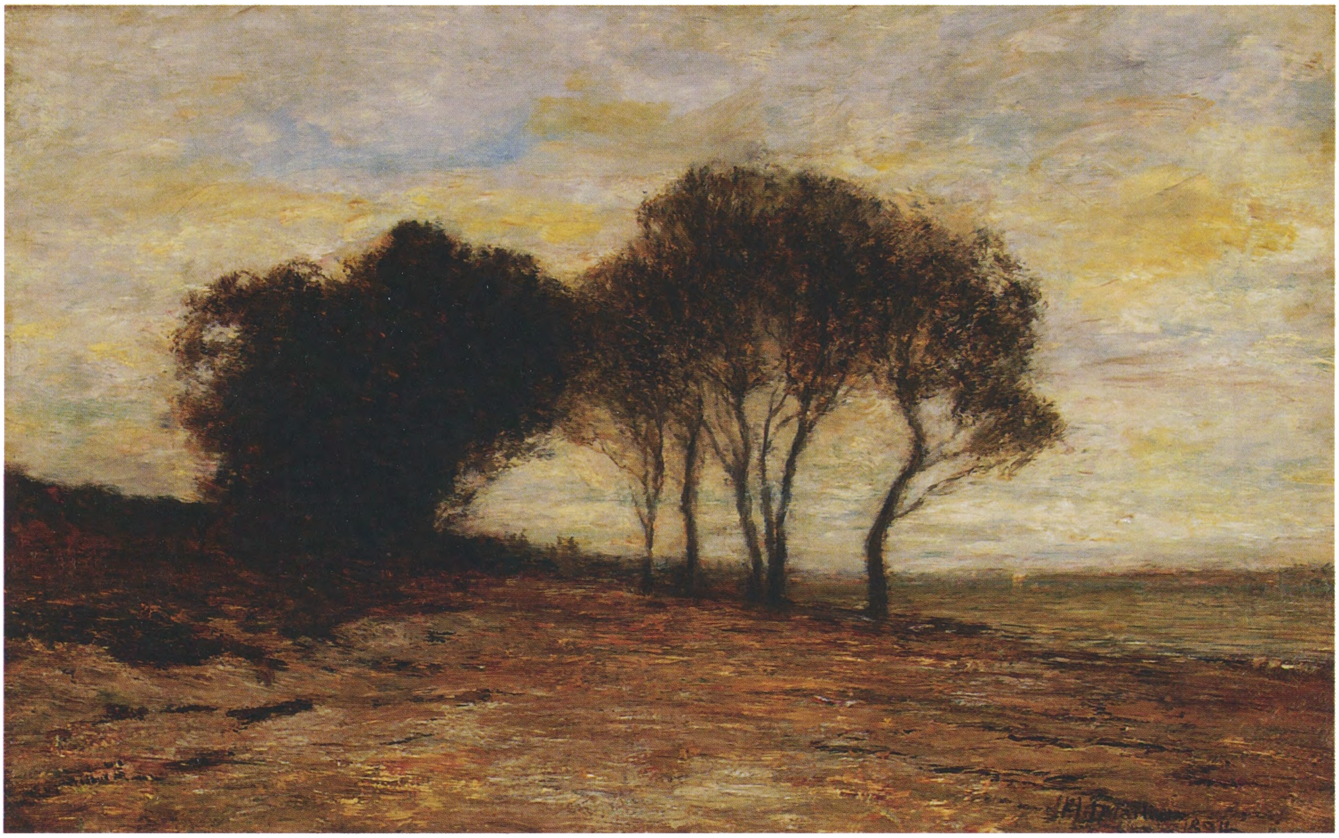


Fig. 1.11. Homer Dodge Martin, *South Side Long Island*, 1894. Oil on canvas, 15½ x 24½ in. Private collection.

did Henry Adams, who made countless trips to the Old World for study and recreation. Both retained a grudging respect for their homeland and the essential goodness of the American character even as they were captivated by the degenerate ways of European society. For the American artist, as was true for Hunt (perhaps less so for La Farge) and for scores of Tonalists, the European training grounds remained both a necessity and a trap. For technical development, the academies of Paris and Munich were critical before seriously sophisticated teaching became available in New York in the 1880s. But all faced the loss of some essential Americaness—the still small voice of their inspiration, if they tarried too long on European shores. It took Hunt a decade after his return—even as he preached an anti-academic gospel to his students—to really free himself from the influences of his training; even the rustic majesty of Millet held him back before he found his real themes and inspiration in his North Shore landscape. Probably the majority of American painters who went to Europe were ultimately ruined by the experience, either staying, only to become expatriate epigoni of dead and dying European masters, or returning to America and churning out school-of-Paris figurative works and portraits for the nouveau riche, who idolized such ersatz tokens of European savoir-faire until about 1900, when the American landscapists fully claimed their birthright and distinction, when the Tonalist landscapes of Inness, Wyant, and Martin were recognized as masterpieces of American art.

Henry James, a pupil of Hunt in Newport, who knew his way around art and artists, expressed the perverse cultural self-deprecation of the expatriate American artist in a short story, in which his character shares James's belief that art was fundamentally a European secret. "We are condemned to be superficial. We are excluded from the magic circle. The soil of American perception is a poor little barren artificial deposit. Yes, we are wedded to imperfection. An American, to excel, has just ten times as much to learn as a European. We lack the deeper sense; we have neither taste, nor tact, nor force. How should we have them? Our crude and garish climate, our silent past, our deafening present, the constant pressure about us of unlovely circumstances, are as void of all that nourishes and prompts and inspires the artist as my sad heart is void of bitterness in saying so."[39] Such a failure of imagination stunted the development of thousands of American painters who came to study in Europe. Few succeeded. Those who did found it a delicate and supremely difficult balancing act. It took an exceptional talent like James to pull it off in literature; relatively few writers or artists managed the trick. As will be seen see in chapter 3, many expatriate artists fell by the wayside, devoured and spit out by American critics who felt they had betrayed their birthright and produced nothing new, nothing individual or progressive, or worse, nothing that expressed American values. Paradoxically, European training did, in fact, revolutionize American art. But the experience had to be gingerly cherrypicked for value, the gold nuggets picked clean of the slurry pan. Just as James fell under the spell of "mellowed harmonies of tint and contour" in Venice, or a heightened awareness of "romance and grace" in Paris, so some of America's finest Tonalists took critical elements of their style from European venues, including the microclimates of Brittany and low-lying Holland, where the pearly gray skies and sumptuous humid air provided the tonal light and atmosphere that became key to the Tonalist aesthetic. In turn, this enchanted feel for tonal light was translated to the American landscape, often under the more propitious dappled skies of autumn and winter and early spring, or the hours before sunset and dawn—so reinvigorating the once barren and charmless corners of America with a rediscovered mystic grace. The "subtle modulations of delight" once only available to American travelers in distant lands had finally been discovered—through the transforming eye of figures like Inness—on home ground.

In the meantime, certainly from the 1860s on, Boston provided the sophisticated support for art collecting in which Tonalism first flourished. Though pressed on many sides, the Boston-Cambridge intelligentsia retained much of its old New England pride and sense of moral superiority—its infamous Boston snobbery, especially toward the mercantile culture and growing economic dominance of New York. As far back as 1854, Charles Dickens traveling in Boston had noticed the Brahmin class's habit of flaunting its intellectual superiority over its New York rivals. The Hudson River picturesque, the sublime, the vastness of the wilderness found little appeal in Boston, which considered such exuberance and rapture endemic to the showy and ambitious tastes of New York. The New Englander was more insular, drawn to his habitual rural enclaves, especially the old family homesteads he knew and loved so well in Concord, Deerfield, Gloucester, and in the summer retreats along the coast from Newport to Nahant and Beverly, increasingly frequented by Boston's best families. Hunt fed and fostered Bostonians' return to the land of their roots, a bucolic ideal deepened by a classical Harvard education and the pastoral values of Greece and Rome. If New Englanders turned to Europe for culture and wanderlust, the small Tonalist or Barbizon landscape also reminded them of their enduring relationship with rural life. If Boston dealers Vose, Doll & Richards, and Williams and Everett catered to Boston tastes in the "French manner," it was because the painterly and rustic style of the Barbizon artists appealed to the classical mind, a mind steeped in the metaphors of sowing and reaping and the cycle of the seasons. The New England mind found pleasure in Hunt and Inness and La Farge almost two decades before New York. A transplanted New Yorker like Isabella Stewart Gardner filled her Venetian palazzo, Fenway Court, with the best the Old World had to offer sophisticated Bostonian taste from Titian, Botticelli, and Vermeer (old masters in the Tonalist bloodline), but also included American Tonalists like Whistler and Dennis Miller Bunker. Gardner, like so many Boston collectors, was inspired by Harvard art historian Charles Eliot Norton; she made it her life's work to bring beautiful things to America, and so transform the artistic wasteland that plagued the ambivalent soul of America's cultural elite.

In fact, Boston in the 1860s and 1870s and later was awash with art feeling and interest in things aesthetic. In 1870, with the encouragement of Hunt, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts was founded, and in the same year the Boston Art Club established a clubhouse and began a regular schedule of exhibitions. By 1876 La Farge was working on his Trinity Church murals. Along with the growth of artistic institutions came a shift in Boston's cultural attitudes as the accoutrements of refinement found their way into city drawing rooms.

"Lounges appeared in houses that were studies in colour, hung with purple curtains, with rooms that were harmonies in green or melodies in blue; and even the Roman nose that had flourished in Boston was losing its severity of outline. On all sides, the question rose, What place was art to have in the satisfactory human life that Boston was trying to realize? Already a species of art-cant, as sharp observers called it, was displacing the commoner cant of religion and culture, and one heard on every hand the phrase, 'He is a true artist,' or 'She has not the feeling of an artist.' Everything was 'artistic' or 'inartistic.'... The outburst of aesthetic feeling that expressed itself in the new museum was part of a wider movement of emotional growth. One saw this in religion, in all the fields of social habit; one saw it in the changing names of children. A generation of Mauds and Enids, of Alices, Daisys and Daphnes, of Isabels, Mariannes, Elaines and Graces was growing in the garden where once the fresh New England flowers had borne such names as Abigail and Hannah.... The spiritual element was generally submerged in the social, humanitarian, aesthetic, in music, dancing, lectures and oyster suppers.... Days that had once been merely misty were described now as 'Corot days'...."[40]

With Hunt's passing from the scene in 1879, Boston went into a slow slide toward more tepid, if sometimes adventurous, tastes for French Impressionism, especially early Monet, along with his Boston School followers who had flocked to the master's knee at Giverny.[41] In the 1880s and 1890s, the brilliant expatriate John Singer Sargent, who hailed from an old Boston family, dazzled patrons and artists alike with his tour-de-force bravura painting but probably stifled more daring tastes for a generation. In the 1880s, New York, prompted by New Englanders Hunt, La Farge, Currier, Dewing, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Robert Swain Gifford, took up the flame of a more progressive and dynamic art. Many members of Boston's literary crowd followed suit and in the decades to follow New York became the center of American publishing, with William Gilder's *Scribner's Magazine* and then *The Century Magazine* leading the charge for the Tonalist landscape. In the decades before the turn of the century, volumes of Emerson and Thoreau found their way onto the shelves of all literate Americans; the Boston and Cambridge elites of philosophers, historians, and scientists took up teaching posts across the country, while artist-teachers like Hermann Dudley Murphy and Arthur Wesley Dow spread the Whistlerian-Japanese design aesthetic far and wide. Boston's early infatuation with Asian art, religion, and aesthetics by collectors and scholars proved an ongoing taproot of inspiration for Tonalism and some of the most progressive movements in American design. By 1900, Boston's embrace of Tonalism had been writ large across the nation. The city's savvy collectors continued to amass some of the finest examples of George Inness, Alexander Wyant, Whistler, Twachtman, J. Francis Murphy, Homer's late Tonalist seascapes, and other important Tonalists in the following decades. Boston never stopped being a "Tonalist kind of town."[42]

John La Farge: "The Nestor of American Painters"

With the exception of Inness and Whistler, John La Farge (1835–1910) was the most important and influential artist in America in the four decades before 1900. His many fields of endeavor and occasionally indifferent output have tended to obscure his impact, an impact that as often as not took place behind the scenes in the artistic organizations he championed, the standards he upheld, and the individual artists he inspired and nurtured. Though La Farge remained a New Yorker all his life, he retained family ties to France, and even stronger ties to the fonts of New England culture, especially in Newport and Boston. If anything, it might be said that La Farge, in tandem with Hunt, ultimately infused the New York art world with Boston's refined attitudes toward modern French art, along with much of the region's love affair with the domestic landscape and concomitant Transcendentalist preoccupations with soul, man, and nature. His participation in the founding of the Society of American Artists in 1877 helped bring about the most far-reaching reformation of American art in the nineteenth century (fig. 1.14).

La Farge was an extraordinary autodidact. He was a Catholic who understood Buddhism like a Sangha monk, who found the competing loyalties of liberal Protestantism a mess and yet embodied its search for an inner light. He virtually invented himself, creating his most innovative and finest work as a young man in the 1860s at Newport—and doing so by rejecting much of Hunt's teaching and European academicism. Where Hunt was a convivial live wire of strong viewpoints, the soft-spoken and introverted La Farge was a bookish and intensely focused aesthete and intellectual powerhouse on a par with his great friend Henry Adams. His innovative and brilliant Newport landscapes and still lifes of the 1860s had everything to do with his insatiable intellect—comparable to that of his Newport neighbor, the nature writer Thomas Wentworth Higginson—and less to do with his nearly negligible training in Paris under Couture; his early landscapes are exquisite windows into the New England mind. If there is an urtext for the Tonalist landscape, La Farge's intimate Newport landscapes are it: pure gems of meditation in light and color. By steadfastly going his own way, La Farge virtually invented the Tonalist landscape, and he did so by extracting it from the deeper past—his "real past"—of the Dutch school, Velásquez, Delacroix, Corot, and the Venetian Renaissance. As he observed: "[W]e have had the struggle to represent light by colours, by an arrangement of colours, an opposition of colour, a concatenation of colour."[43] His early study and familiarity with Japanese prints and the color theories of M. E. Chevreul formed the essential paradigm of his art, an art composed under natural light with delicate, sometimes infinitely modulated opaline tonal masses. As a colorist, La Farge had few peers. The historian Samuel Isham wrote of La Farge in 1905, "[T]he great reputation of La Farge has been as a colorist, and rightly so; but color with him is not an external grace added to the picture, nor is it the subject-

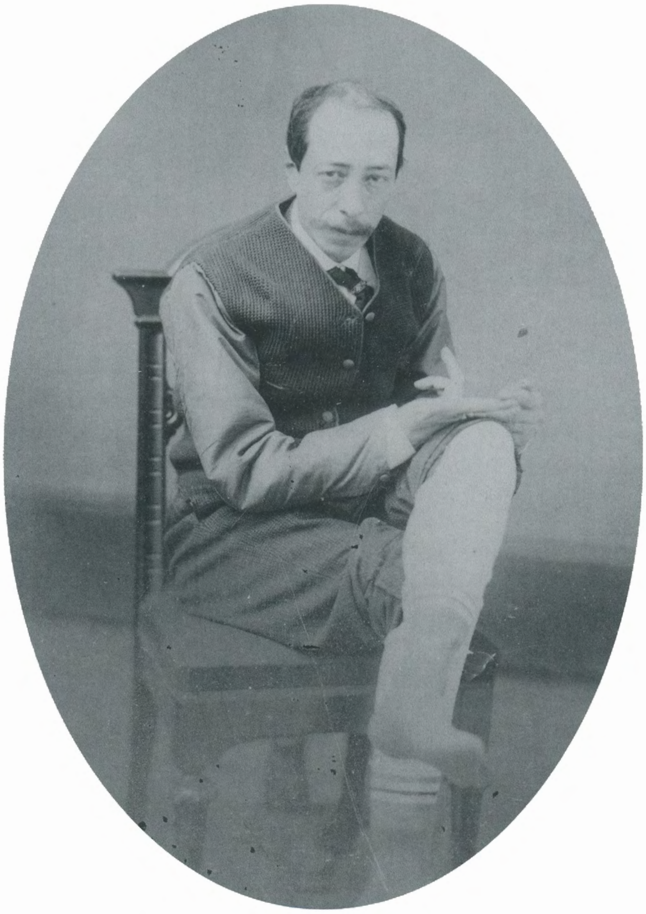


Fig. 1.12. Portrait of John La Farge, c. 1877, Ferrotype. Yale University Art Gallery. Gift of Henry A. La Farge.

matter as sometimes with Hunt; it is like the composition or the brush work, a means of conveying the emotion... his painting vibrates with it."[44]

La Farge was not just a great artist, but a great man, according to Henry James. His was a mind that could dazzle even Henry Adams, who found La Farge an indispensable companion on his travels to Japan and the South Pacific. With the exception of George Inness in his late synthetic landscapes, and Homer toward the end of his career with his magnificent seascapes, no other American artist deployed such wide-ranging intellectual brilliance, technical resourcefulness, spirituality, and sublime sensitivity to tone and color, and their arrangement and elucidation under conditions of natural light. As La Farge's biographer Royal Cortissoz observed, "His vision pierced deeper than that of the artist who would deal in forthright domineering fashion with 'things seen.' He could not shake off the glamour of things unseen but felt... there was always a beauty just beyond his reach. And yet, as I cannot too often emphasize, there went hand in hand with his subtle, spiritualizing conception of art, that habit of the scientific inquirer and experimentalist in technique which allied him to the great realists in painting."[45] In this among many things, La Farge was philosophically aligned with the New England Transcendentalist tradition. His Newport landscapes are Emersonian epiphanies that speak "to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty." He combines like no other that curious American amalgam of the experimentalist and mystic.

La Farge did it all: easel paintings, watercolor, murals, sculpture, stained glass, illustration, drawing, designing, and writing on art, criticism, and travelogues. As a teacher, friend, and companion he influenced innumerable artists and non-artists, along with some of the greatest minds of his age. William and Henry James found his company endlessly fascinating, and Henry Adams found a soul-mate for his inquiring mind. Wrote Adams, "In conversation, La Farge's mind was opaline with infinite shades and refractions of light and with color toned down to its finest gradations.... To La Farge, eccentricity meant convention; a mind really eccentric never betrayed it. True eccentricity was a tone—a shade—a *nuance*—and the finer the tone, the truer the eccentricity."[46] As a conversationalist La Farge dazzled all who knew him. Many listened with bated breath to his long, complex and allusive disquisitions, often drawn out by searching parenthetical expressions on collateral topics. He was like Leonardo da Vinci—everything fascinated him. If his reputation as an artist has suffered during the almost one hundred years since his death, it is mostly a result of the enormous range of his production in different media and the uneven quality that sometimes resulted. His lifelong poor health, ruinous business affairs, and marital discords may well have affected his output. He was also a man beset by many conflicting ideas, which his good friend Henry Adams saw as one of his great strengths. "He had no difficulty in carrying different shades of contradiction in his mind.... Even a contradiction to him was only a shade of difference, a complementary color about which no intelligent artist could dispute."[47]

La Farge was born into a New York family of well-to-do French expatriates with deep Catholic ties and allegiances to the Old World. As a child he was surrounded by books and challenging conversation. At a young age he was trained in drawing and exposed to art through illustrated books, prints, and a wide range of sparkling personalities who frequented the family home on Washington Square. La Farge was precocious, his mind encyclopedic, his imagination brimming. He set off to Europe in 1856 and spent a little less than a year traveling around to various cities and galleries, sketching and absorbing the work of the old masters, especially Rembrandt and Velásquez, and studying for a short time with Hunt's teacher Thomas Couture. Soon after his return to New York in the fall of 1857, he briefly took up law but found he could not turn his back on the artistic career for which his youthful enthusiasms and talents had prepared him. The death of his father in 1858 and a financial inheritance allowed him to live the life of an artist. As he dryly put it after a career of many ups and downs, "No one has struggled more against his destiny than I.... I had hoped to find some other mode of life, some other way of satisfying the desire for the contemplation of truth, unbiased, free, and undetached."[48] In this he was very much like the young Hunt. He took a studio in the Tenth Street Studio Building (custom-designed for artists by Hunt's architect brother, Richard Morris Hunt), then a hotbed of Hudson River School artists, which he retained to the end of his life. (In the late 1860s, La Farge would share his Tenth Street studio with the important Hudson River School artist and later Tonalist painter, Homer Dodge Martin.) In the spring of 1859, La Farge relocated to Newport, Rhode Island, to study with William Morris Hunt. It is here, over the following ten years, inspired by the landscapes of Paradise, a nearby tract of raw and hilly country along the coastline, that La Farge virtually created the style and look of the Tonalist landscape. In doing so, La Farge set the mold for the Tonalist artist: his deep emotional investment in one place, in concert with his modus operandi of intense and unremitting study of the Paradise landscape and the subtleties of tone that he dissected under subdued light, made the man and his art.

The Miracle of Paradise

What happened at Paradise in 1859 and the decade of the 1860s was an extraordinary confluence of talent and circumstance. La Farge was a well-prepared young artist, a brilliant intellectual steeped in the history and technical know-how of his craft. In Newport he received the tutelage and steady

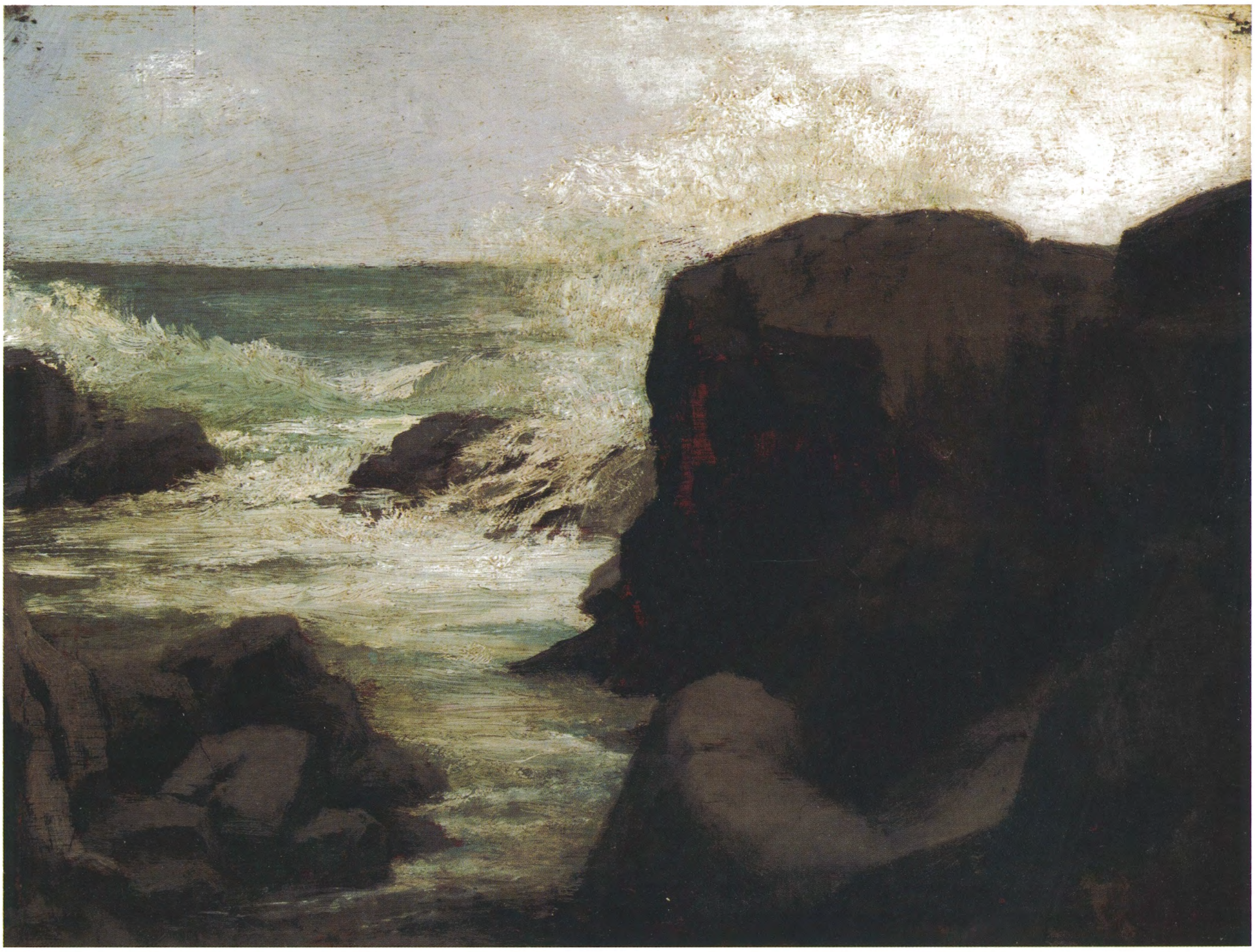


Fig. 1.13. John La Farge, *Sea and Rocks near Spouting Horn*, 1859. Oil on panel, 9½ x 12½ in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Robert Jordan Fund and gift of Rebekah A. Taube in memory of Moses Alpers, 1986.1016.

encouragement of his mentor, Hunt, which he outgrew in a matter of months. But perhaps most important, he found the inspiration of a barren yet haunting landscape of valleys and hills—often veiled in mists and humid sea air—that challenged and then facilitated the preternaturally sensitive La Farge's exploration of revolutionary ways of tonal painting. The area attracted the novelist Henry James as well, who along with his brother William James, the philosopher-psychologist, was also a student of Hunt's in Newport at the time. This was the pre–Civil War Newport and not the fashionable watering place for the rich of later decades. Looking back, Henry James would write nostalgically of the dreamy spell of the coastline and the soft crystalline atmosphere produced by the mists rolling in off the sea. "Newport imposed itself at that period to so remarkable a degree as the one right residence, in all our great country, for those tainted under whatever attenuations with the quality and effect of detachment.... The atmospheric tone, the careful selection of ingredients, your pleasant sense of a certain climatic ripeness—these are the real charms of Newport.... You are affected by the admirable art of the landscape—with so narrow a range of color and form.... It is in the combined loveliness of tone, as painters call it... in mingled shades of yellow and gray."[49] By 1900, Newport had taken its place along with Brittany, Venice, and the Thames of Whistler—all with their characteristic misty microclimates—as epicenters of the Tonalist style.

It was this refinement of light and color inspired by the seacoast around Newport, which produced subtle and haunting variations of tone, that La Farge set out to capture in his landscapes and still lifes of the 1860s. A small oil on panel of a rocky coastline, *Sea and Rocks near Spouting Horn*, 1859 (fig. 1.15), comes as close as anything La Farge did to showing the influence of Hunt, and through Hunt, Millet—the patron saint of Hunt's studio, according to La Farge. The broad flattened forms of the rocks and the bold patterns of light and dark are reminiscent of Millet and Hunt, but the subtle depiction and elucidation of complementary tones is La Farge's real subject. La Farge largely ignored Hunt's reliance on recipes and remained intent on finding his own path. "[T]o some extent I had to fight out my own issue, and Hunt and I disagreed, but

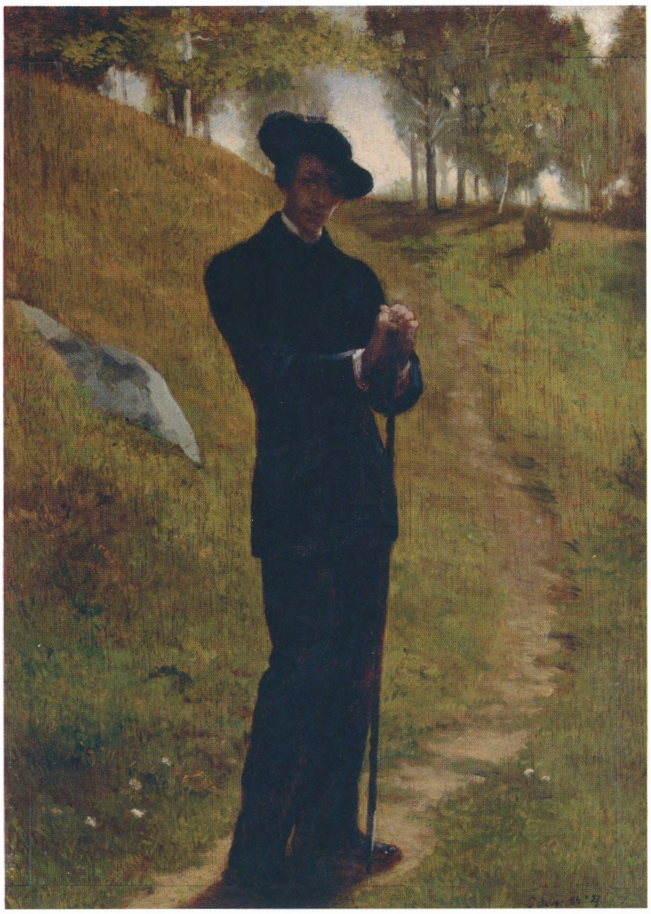


Fig. 1.14. John La Farge, *Portrait of the Painter*, 1859. Oil on wood panel, 16 x 11½ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Samuel D. Lee Fund, 1934, 34.134.

we had so many common beliefs and Hunt's was so charming a mind, that often he was the first and only one to praise me when I departed from his method, as from his general views."[50] He felt that Hunt neglected the place in which his figures existed, the air, light, and space, and noted that even Millet had told Hunt that the artist must find something individual—something exclusively of himself—to say. La Farge recognized Hunt's potentially fatal attraction to European academicism long before his teacher did. It was the supersensible reality of landscape and still lifes exposed to natural light to which La Farge was drawn. "There I wished to apply principles of light and color of which I had learned a little. I wished my studies of nature to indicate something of this, to be free from *recipes*, as far as possible, and to indicate very carefully, in every part, the exact time of day and circumstances of light."[51]

La Farge's determination to break the mold, assert his individuality, and do something entirely new, was not simply the brashness of precocious youth, but the calculated ambitions of an artistic mind bathed from childhood in the visual and emotive sensations drawn from the canon of the Western cultural tradition—and with the added fillip of the exotic art of Asia. It was the refinement of tone, something La Farge had early discerned in Japanese prints, that turned him away from Hunt and set him on his course. "Hunt thought it useless to carry the refinement of tone and color to the extent which I aimed at in my studies, telling me that there would not be one in a hundred or five hundred artists capable of appreciating such differences of accuracy—their eyes and their training would not be sufficient. This objection seemed to me, as I told him, exactly the reason why I should, for certain, aim at these variations from *recipe*. So much the better, if only one man in a thousand could see it; I should then have exactly what I wanted in the appeal to the man who knew and to the mind like mine."[52]

Something of this supremely confident and inner-directed spirit is captured in La Farge's self-portrait of 1859, *Portrait of the Painter* (fig. 1.16), set in the family's Glen Cove, Long Island retreat. The lithe, cocky, bohemian pose of the artist-aesthete, balanced on his umbrella—an accoutrement of his trade—was actually derived from a photograph and integrated into the landscape, the figure placed so as to dramatize La Farge's youthful ardor and impetuous striking out on the upland path. The high horizon with a brief scrim of trees against the sky allows the artist to indulge his exquisite tonal modalities in creating the shimmering verdant backdrop to his intrepid pose. This he accomplished by applying varying analogous greens in horizontal and vertical passages, both capturing the rich feel of natural light and setting up a pulsing, vibrant sensation of color that radiates a kind of spiritual glow, surrounding the standing figure of the artist in a halation of mysterious light. There is nothing quite like this in American art up to this time. The high horizon in *Portrait of the Painter* is an uncanny precursor of the compositional strategy that the French naturalist painter Jules Bastien-Lepage advocated to his American disciples twenty years later, and which would become a classic trope of the Tonalist mode in the 1880s. Already in 1859 and the early 1860s, La Farge had developed the high horizon line in his small-scale panel studies at Paradise and Glen Cove as a mean of floating his tonal planes, flattening his forms on the surface of his panel or canvas (similar to Japanese woodcuts), and so enabling a fuller exploration of the nuances of complementary colors within his landscapes.

It may be that La Farge, at least early on, pursued experiments in the elucidation of light and color at Paradise, while saving more finished or worked-up paintings for the family home in Glen Cove. *Landscape with Cows*, circa 1862 (fig. 1.17), is a full-blown Tonalist landscape, consolidating and extrapolating all the advances La Farge had achieved with his *Portrait of the Painter*, here incorporated into a beautifully balanced composition invoking the pleasures of the domestic landscape. Although touching on Barbizon models, and more likely the example of Inness from the early 1860s, *Landscape with Cows* is all about the artist's indulgence in a vibrant display of various green tonalities in the foreground grasses and the more

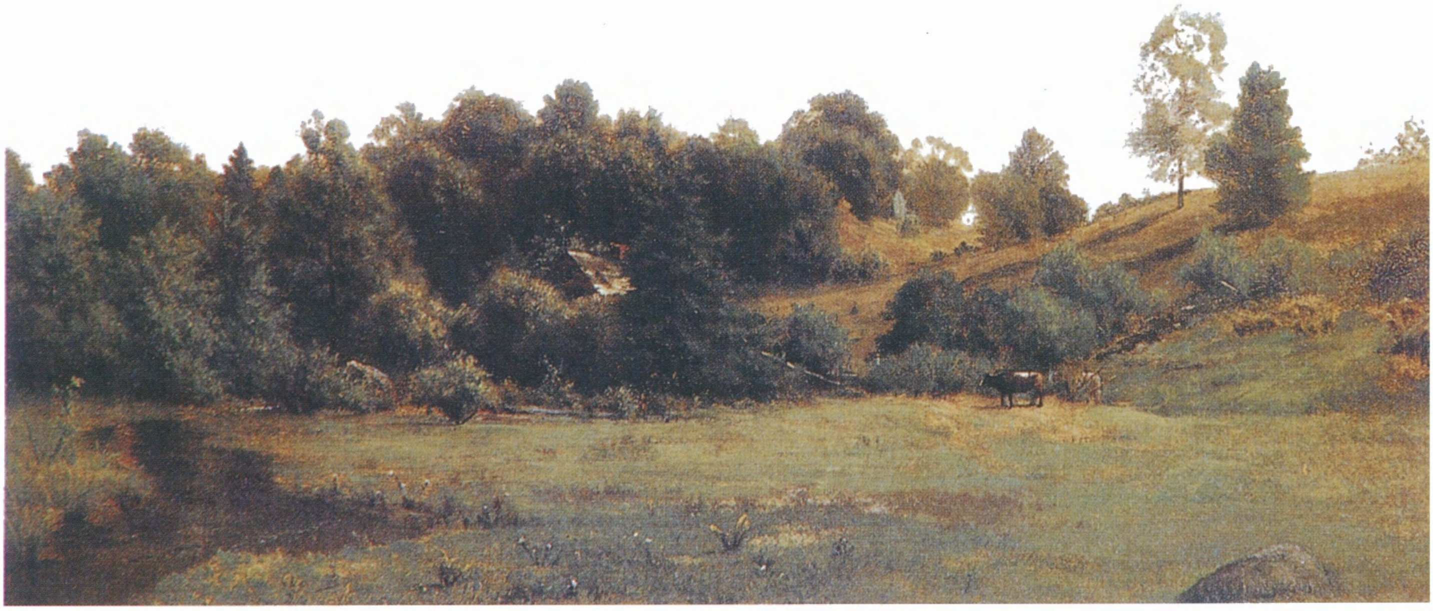


Fig. 1.15. John La Farge, *Landscape with Cows*, c. 1862. Oil on canvas, 13½ x 22½ in. Courtesy William Vareika Fine Arts.

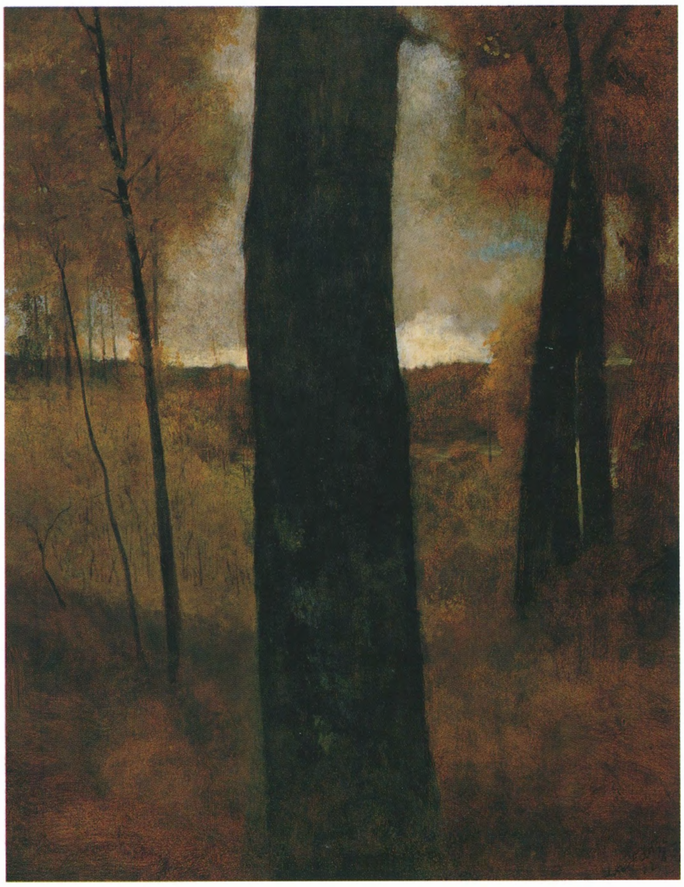


Fig. 1.16. John La Farge, *Edge of Forest*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 26¾ x 22 in. Courtesy William Vareika Fine Arts.

textured greens filling the branches of the middle-ground trees. The compositional equipoise and decorative patterning, which lead the eye in diagonals into recessional space, anticipate the Aesthetic movement and the intimate Tonalist landscapes of the early 1880s. Even more astonishing is *Edge of Forest*, 1863 (fig. 1.18), possibly drawn from the landscape of Glen Cove, which, in its bold design, flattened forms, and muted tonalities—clearly derived from Japanese woodblocks—anticipates the decorative landscapes of Aesthetic Tonalism that only became common in the mid-1880s. La Farge's technical experiments with textured surfaces, the rub-ins and rub-outs of surface pigment allowing the undertones to show through, thus unifying and harmonizing the composition, seem to even anticipate Whistler's pathbreaking techniques in this line. The sheer bravura, variety, and daring of the decorative patterning is astonishing. The hazy, soft-edged quality of the forms, eliding one into another, adds an element of mysterious power and ambiguity; the looming tree forms, cropped as in Japanese prints, hint at unseen presences and an uncanny anthropomorphism. The dramatic juxtaposition of near and far, of natural shapes both bold and delicate, anticipates by almost thirty years the interest in symbolic form that reached a crescendo by 1900. It is difficult to fully appreciate the influence of such landscapes on La Farge's fellow artists, but it must have been profound and widespread, both in Boston and in his National Academy and Tenth Street studio circles in

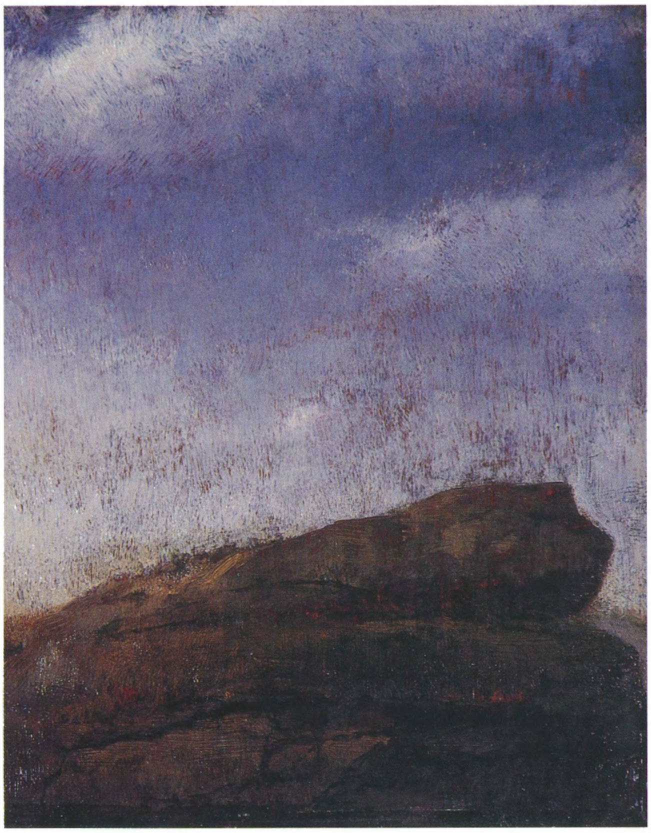


Fig. 1.17. John La Farge, *Berkeley's or Hanging Rock, Paradise, North Wind*, 1869. Oil on cradled panel, 11 x 9 in. Courtesy William Vareika Fine Arts.

New York in the 1860s and 1870s, culminating in the early years of the Society of American Artists in the 1880s.[53] La Farge's Tenth Street Studio mate and friend, Homer Dodge Martin, was surely impelled to move away from his early Hudson River–style landscapes by exposure to La Farge's work, while Alexander Wyant and even George Inness may well have picked up garnered ideas.

Produced at Paradise, *Berkeley's or Hanging Rock, Paradise, North Wind*, 1869 (fig. 1.19), displays La Farge's ability to integrate his study of light and atmosphere into a naturalistic landscape, concentrating on a few dramatic forms while reducing details to a bare minimum and so elucidating the somber mood of the scene, an evocation of stopped time. Local colors are veiled in atmosphere, strangely ethereal yet ordinary. The painting combines a frank naturalism with a patient study of outdoor light and informality with exquisite artistry. Boulders and sky and the sophisticated depiction of like tones float as a whole to the picture plane for the delectation of the viewer. Such small landscapes La Farge liked to call "pictures of Nature," as opposed to pictures of a picture—paintings painted from historical examples or restricted by academic formulas created in the studio and in studio light in contrast to outdoor light.

Beginning in 1859 and throughout the 1860s and into the 1870s, at Paradise on the Rhode Island coast, La Farge painted small landscapes on panel, some mere studies (though finished enough in the artist's mind), which by way of exquisitely crafted color planes capture the full experience of light, air, and space beyond the confines of the studio, in the nearby hills and pastures along the seacoast. It has been suggested that La Farge's experiments in plein air painting anticipate the Impressionists, but the artist's goal had little to do with the Impressionists' emphasis on the material quality of bright sunlight, or the scintillation of bright midday light, the vibrancy and dazzle of effervescent moment. La Farge's tonal light (as with Hunt's)—soft, cool, atmospheric—has to do with mood and time, not passing instants of time but seasonal time, metamorphic time. His is an art of the perennial moment. La Farge was after an elusive quarry. "My youthful intolerance required the relations of colour for shadow and for light to be based on some scheme of colour-light that would allow oppositions and gradations representing the effects of the different directions and intensities of light in nature, and I already became much interested in the question of the effects of complementary colours."[54] A spiritual calculus is also discernible in La Farge's early tonal work, in which the work of art serves as an intermediary between the observed subject and the subjective vision of the seer. There is something strangely haunting about these sometimes off-kilter glimpses of place, a casual arbitrariness that gives them the feel of the actual, of felt life. Given the Newport and Boston circles in which La Farge moved, he was surely aware of the writings of Emerson, and possibly Thoreau, which touch on many of the same subjective responses to the natural world. La Farge, too, was very much in concert with the explorations into human nature later pursued by his friends William and Henry James. William James wrote about the way in which perception and feeling were inextricably mixed, and the variability and multifaceted nature of human emotion. Novelist Henry James endlessly dissected the various reactions of his characters to their circumstances: the fragmented visions, reinterpreted from one angle after another, which approximated the splintered reality of lived life. In some ways, La Farge was as much an experimentalist as William James, pursuing his studies of light-color with near-scientific fervor, though the final result of his art remained a profoundly personal and ultimately subjective expression. This interior vision was something largely untapped by the American artists of La Farge's youth. Only George Inness, who shared La Farge's religious nature (Inness was a fervent Swedenborgian, not a Catholic like La Farge), was proceeding along similarly spiritualizing lines in his Medfield landscapes of the early 1860s. Whistler, the apostle of art for art's sake, was similarly disposed in the 1860s in distant London, pursuing his inimitable mystically attuned aestheticism.

What La Farge shares with the great American innovators of the period in the literary, philosophical, and artistic realms is an ability to draw on the vast storehouse of European culture—to thoroughly internalize it, in a sense domesticate it, and turn it to distinctively personal, and thus originally American ends. Success, and the avoidance of bland imitation of academic models, required a delicate balance of American values and European sophistication. La Farge's unique gift was that he seems to have achieved the balance right from the very start; it allowed him to take flight. Inness struggled for a similar equilibrium right through the late 1870s. Whistler managed the trick by reinventing himself within ten years of his student days in Paris. Hunt only found his way in his last decade.

La Farge had another resource to draw upon in his landscapes, still lifes, and genre subjects of the 1860s—Japanese art. From an early age he had read about early Dutch encounters with the mysterious Japanese islands and later in his travels to Paris in 1856 had probably come into contact with Japanese ukiyo-e art and woodblock prints, which he began to avidly collect after his return to the United States. He married Margaret Perry, a granddaughter of Admiral Matthew C. Perry who had been instrumental in opening up Japan to the West. Because of his poor eyesight and bad health, probably malaria contracted on a visit to Louisiana in 1860, La Farge was unfit for service in the Civil War, though he was much caught up in developments from the front. He thus remained in Newport during the war fraught years, forgoing further European training, and concentrating on his studies of light and color. In the early 1860s, he and a Newport friend, John Bancroft, became absorbed in the purchase and study of Japanese color prints. "The very serious point to me was the display in certain of these color prints of landscape relations in color. This is done so simply as to give a continuous explanation of how the painter built his scheme, and for Bancroft and myself, interested in constructing similar schemes, according to modern scientific analyses, this Japanese confirmation and occasional teaching was full of most serious interest."[56] La Farge found in Japanese prints a confirmation, in a simplified and even schematic form, of the classic methods of Western art in terms of the arrangement of line, color, and form in harmonious tonal masses, and yet another confirmation of the radically conservative revolution he was embarking upon based on the work of Velásquez, Rembrandt, and the Venetians.

The parallels with Whistler are tantalizing. By the early to mid-1860s, Whistler was exploiting the decorative potential of Japanese art and evolving his unique ethereal style that would result during 1865–66 in his near abstractions of the sea and the Thames. La Farge seems to have heard accounts of Whistler's paintings in the early 1860s, and may have acquired a more complete idea of Whistler's work from his early etchings, but La Farge developed his innovations independently. Whistler, an American to his fingertips, evolved his revolutionary art at the very heart of European culture, in the heady dynamo of the Paris–London art axis, while La Farge, born of French parents and steeped in European culture from birth, achieved a similar result tucked away during the Civil War in a tiny rural enclave along the Rhode Island coast. These pioneers of Tonalism, eccentric, multi-talented American originals (both deeply involved in the decorative arts), would not actually meet until 1895. La Farge's Newport, though a backwater, was filled with intense intellectual life: Boston's intelligentsia, including Oliver Wendell Homes, Julia Ward Howe, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in addition to William and Henry James, all spent time there. La Farge's art touched on a brooding melancholy and wistfulness that the contrast of time past and present as well as the horrors of the Civil War, suggested to many in the Newport of those days.[56] A haunting and anomalous—and surprisingly modern—landscape of 1864, *In the Forest* (fig. 1.20), suggests that La Farge was far from being immune to the slaughter on the Civil War battlefields. Probably painted in or around Newport, this forest interior, full of slashing, activated paint handling and wet-into-wet color tones, seems the outburst of distraught emotion. This is nature red in tooth and claw, vital yet forbidding, undergoing metamorphosis before our eyes, a splatter of crimson looking as much like a splatter of blood as autumn leaves.

After a series of financial disasters, which forced a move from Newport in 1864, La Farge returned in 1865 and began a period of renting homes in nearby Paradise, further intensifying his focus on the landscape by virtue of proximity to his painting ground and daily excursions to the sparsely covered hills and valleys with their dramatic outcropping of puddingstone. The result was his first masterpieces. La Farge's small-scale studies of landscape culminated in his extraordinary *Paradise Valley*, begun in 1866 and completed in 1868 (fig. 1.21), arguably the most important painting in the history of late nineteenth-century American art. La Farge painted *Paradise Valley* over a number of years, building a small hut overlooking the seacoast valley where he could store his canvas between painting sessions. The place, according to Van Wyck Brooks, "was almost as lonely and bare as Thoreau's at Walden. He liked to withdraw to this retreat, to meditate while he painted, for La Farge was a thinker and writer as well as an artist."[57] The canvas suffered damage from fishermen and gypsies who broke into his storage hut. La Farge had very definite ambitions for the landscape. "I undertook a combination of a large variety of problems which were not in the line of my fellow artists here, nor did I know of anyone in Europe who at that time undertook them. My programme was to paint from nature a portrait . . . which was both novel and absolutely 'everydayish.' I therefore had to choose a special moment of the day and a special kind of weather at a special time of year when I could count on the effect being repeated. Hence, naturally, I painted just where I lived, within a few hundred yards from my house. I chose a number of difficulties in combination so as to test my acquaintance with them both in theory of color and light and

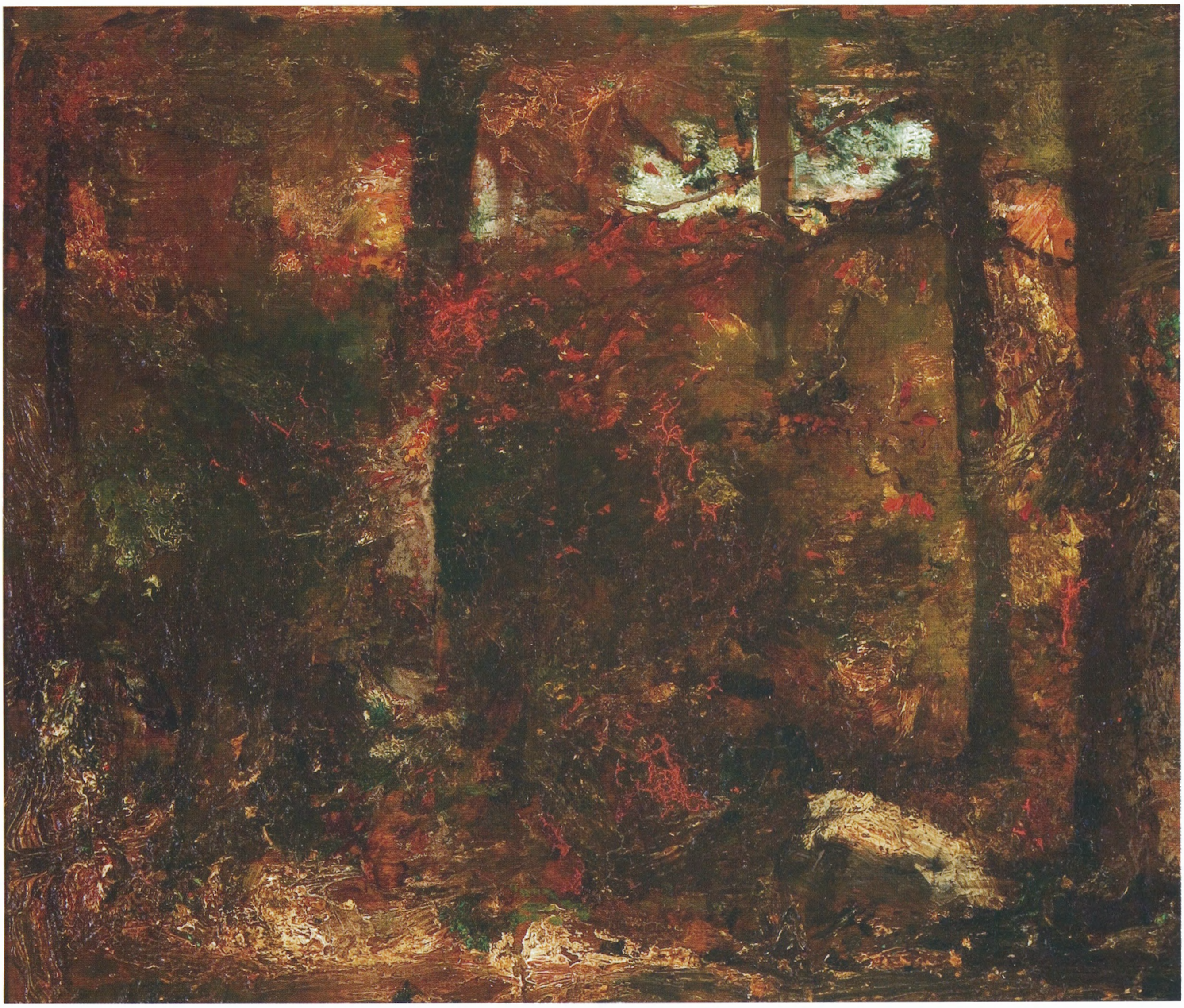


Fig. 1.18. John La Farge, *In the Forest*, 1864. Oil on canvas, 10 x 12 in. Courtesy William Vareika Fine Arts.

in the practice of painting itself. I chose a time of day when the shadows falling away from me would not help me to model or draw, or make ready arrangements for me, as in the concoction of pictures usually; and I took a fairly covered day, which would increase the absence of shadows. That would be thoroughly commonplace, as we see it all the time, and yet we know it to be beautiful, like most of the 'out-of-doors.'"[58]

La Farge's description of his methods and goals is practically a manifesto of Tonalism's central goals, which *Paradise Valley*, a full-blown avatar of the style, perfectly embodies. La Farge focuses on a scene of close-by home ground—a modus operandi followed by almost every Tonalist landscapist of the next generation—restricting himself to a particular season and time of day, and thus the specific quality of subdued light in which shadows are largely absent and the multitudinous tonal variations in local color are most apparent and most striking. The resultant harmony of tone, the vibration and glow, is evocative of the spiritual grandeur hidden behind the quotidian. This elucidation of the spiritual in the everyday was to preoccupy Tonalists from George Inness and Alexander Wyant to Whistler and Dwight Tryon. To capture the feeling produced by such delicate tonal modalities, La Farge employed what he described as "certain theories of opposition of horizontals and perpendiculars in respect to color."[59] The artist's insistence on naturalism, what in literary terms might be termed showing but not telling—an implicit portrayal and dissection of the minute mysteries of natural light—is what separates the quietude of Tonalist light from the bright glare of Impressionist light and Impressionism's dramatic (unquiet) broken facture. From the perspective of his last years, La Farge was quite clear in his description of the making of *Paradise Valley*, that he was not a proto-Impressionist. "The main difficulty was to do all this from nature and to keep steadily at the same time to these theories without having them stick out, if I may say so, as some of my intelligent foreign friends managed to do. In nature nothing sticks out. They [presumably the Impressionists] also have since worked out similar problems but they have not always insisted upon that main one, that the problems are not visible in nature. Nature, meaning in this case the landscape we look at, looks as if it had done itself and had not been done by the artist."[60]

This is the radical conservative in La Farge, who extols the craft of his profession and the circumspection of his historically based style over undue self-display or technical tricks. *Paradise Valley*, in the context of its place and time, is an unprecedented radical departure. There is no classical rhetoric, no balancing passages of light and dark and stagy vignettes, characteristic of much Barbizon painting, especially in Diaz and Daugbigny. La Farge's light is serenely modulated, the low-toned greens producing an even richness, an all-encompassing atmosphere unifying every element in the composition. Only the lamb in the foreground, reminiscent of Hunt and Barbizon pastoralism, lends an anachronistic or perhaps contemporary note. The high horizon and downward-slanting vantage point comprise a Japanese design influence, which raises the fore- and middle grounds to the picture plane and into the space of the viewer, thus allowing a discreet display of artful brushwork, and a leisurely perusal of the charming color notes formed into stone walls and grazing animals, which subtly but emphatically lead the eye on a wandering course to the fading horizon. Although the view is not circumscribed or intimate in the classic Tonalist mode, encompassing as it does miles of landscape seen from on high, nevertheless the feeling is intimate, of a known and loved place in which the human heart has invested deeply.

The radicalism of *Paradise Valley* in the heyday of the Hudson River School is hard to appreciate today. Even ten years later, when it was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1876, it was ridiculed by critics. "The picture is the admiration of a few and the wonder of many." "La Farge has a green map which he has the impudence to call a picture and ask $3000 for it." "The colouring is monotonous and cold, and the scene is entirely devoid of those bright touches which give life to a landscape."[61] Within a few years, with La Farge in the vanguard, the New York art scene would turn in a more progressive direction and the old Hudson River School and its supporters would be sent packing. La Farge did in fact manage to sell *Paradise Valley* in 1876 for $3,000, a testament to the

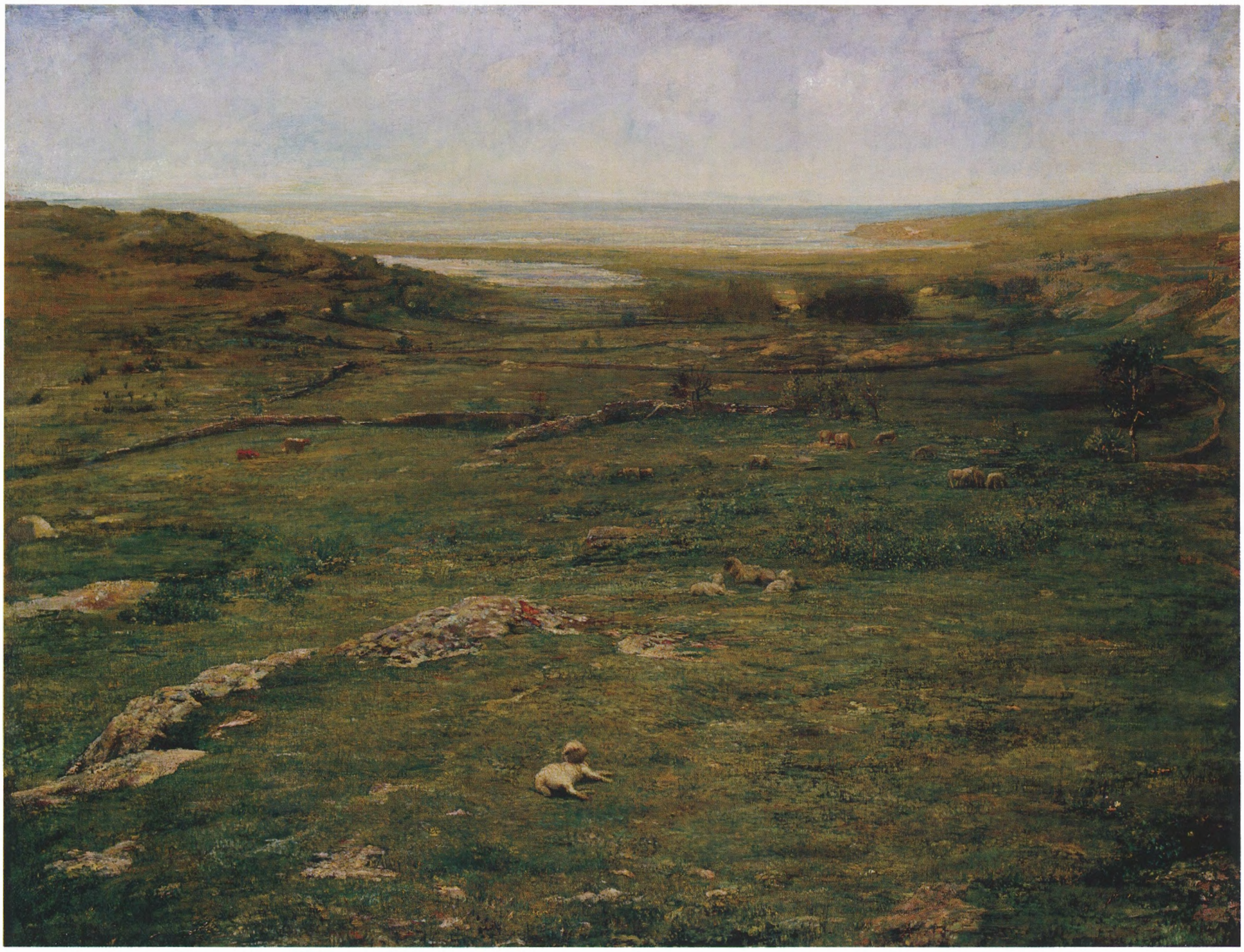


Fig. 1.19. John La Farge, *Paradise Valley*, 1866–68. Oil on canvas, 32⅝ x 42 in. Terra Foundation for American Art, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1996.92.

advanced taste and collecting habits of Boston, where his work sold well throughout his life. Henry James, too, writing about *Paradise Valley* in 1876, could just as well have been describing the incipient revolution in artistic sensibility passing from Boston to New York in the late 1870s—a manifesto for the Tonalist landscape.

"The quality is clear in this picture, which has the gentleness, the repose, the completeness, which the lover of nature finds in a few places which are not necessarily the most obviously picturesque. It is not lugging the highest of the Himalayas into a picture which gives it surely the greatest sublimity; and there is here no straining for effect by display of contrasts, by accumulation of points that cannot fail to catch the eye, but rather the willful rejection of such devices, and a sincere rendering of nature by an artist who has this rare claim to greatness, that he enforces upon us that impression of loveliness in what he has painted, which, when presented us by poet or painter, seems like the easiest simplicity, so high is the art. The evasive, modest beauty of Newport demands of the artist who undertakes to put it on canvas just that sympathy with things delicate and subtle which is shown so often by Mr. La Farge in his paintings. But by subtlety in the present case is meant his power to give what escapes a hasty glance, and rewards only more attentive study. This study, too, it may be said, is not intellectual or literary pondering, which in its time has inspired pictures, but rather that more or less fruitful sensitiveness to emotional impression which some feel in listening to music or in gazing at a sunset. No affection can acquire this art, which has nothing to do with handiwork, but with the soul with which the painter sets about his work; for after all, the artist shows at the best what is in himself."[62]

James's encomium to *Paradise Valley* and La Farge is not just a refutation of the standard-fare picturesque art of his day—the idealization of strict detail, finish, and moral and literary allusions so loved by Victorian society, and embodied in Hudson River School painting—but a modernist paean, championing the individual and subjective spirit that delves into things of the soul, the simple, subtle, and everyday things, the mysteries of memory and the magical moment of deep perception that fill the pages of James's novels. It was very much along the lines of what Emerson and Thoreau had preached to their generation and the revolution Whistler was stirring up in distant London, which Baudelaire and Proust would carry into the twentieth century. If modernism can be partly defined as portraying the life of the times, then certainly the spiritual life of the post–Civil War generation was increasingly directed toward the domestic landscape, the landscape the Tonalists, following La Farge's lead, would make their own.

In 1907, when Tonalism was the dominant mode in American painting, the art historian Charles Caffin wrote of La Farge's early achievement in landscape in terms of revolutionizing American art, reconciling natural and artistic truths in ways the Pre-Raphaelite movement had failed to do, and extending the colorist tradition first espoused by the Venetians. La Farge, Caffin wrote, solved the problem by going beyond the mere imitation of local colors. "The local colours must be represented in their own medium of lighted atmosphere, which surrounds all things and draws them together into a natural appearance of tone. Light, in a word, became the study of La Farge; light in its operation upon local colour; in the infinite diversity of its way of striking objects, directly or by reflection or refraction; and the diminution of light on objects, as things recede from the eye, owing to the layers of intervening atmosphere. He [La Farge] noted also that under the influence of light, a local colour is made more or less brilliant by the juxtaposition of other local colours, which in turn are similarly affected."[63]

From the perspective of 1911, the critic Royal Cortissoz looked back with amazement at the precocity of *Paradise Valley*. "Yet here was a landscape, done in America while the Hudson River School was still active in the land, and preserving qualities of light and atmosphere to which that school had never even begun to attain. Also, it was emphatically modern as anything painted in the last quarter of a century."[64] The artist Ernest Knaufft, writing in 1907, noted, "And still later, when men like Dewing and Twachtman changed the character of their academic technique, caring less for the display of brushwork than for the 'feeling' that permeated their canvases, La Farge's work could hang side by side with theirs, and even at times excel it. Indeed strange to say, the more they advanced the more they seemed to revert to the delicacy of his 1868 picture 'Paradise Valley, Newport.' And when this picture was hung in the Comparative Exhibition in 1904, it seemed cousin german [a blood relation] to the works of Sisley and Monet, the ultra Impressionists of France!" Knaufft perceptively added, "... the pearly tints that he found in the sea-haze when making his early studies from nature at Newport, seem to have permeated all his future paintings, so that the rich blue robes of his figures, and the hyacinth-tinted wings of his angels, are modeled with prismatic colors, and are bathed in a slight amber and opal mist."[65] La Farge, too, in retrospect, well understood that it was those early years of daring and dexterous experimentation that formed the perceptual capital from which everything he had to offer as an artist flowed. "All that I have done since then has been modified by those few years of optical studies, and the last realistic painting which may have shown it is the 'Paradise Valley,' which belongs to '66-'67-'68."[66]

Another La Farge masterpiece of the early period, *The Last Valley—Paradise Rocks*, 1867–68 (fig. 1.22), incorporates a more rough and sketchy manner, closer in style to the artist's small oils set in the neighborhood of Paradise Valley. The contrasts of light and shadow are stark and the style vigorous, full of expressive brushstrokes, particularly in the foreground ledge.

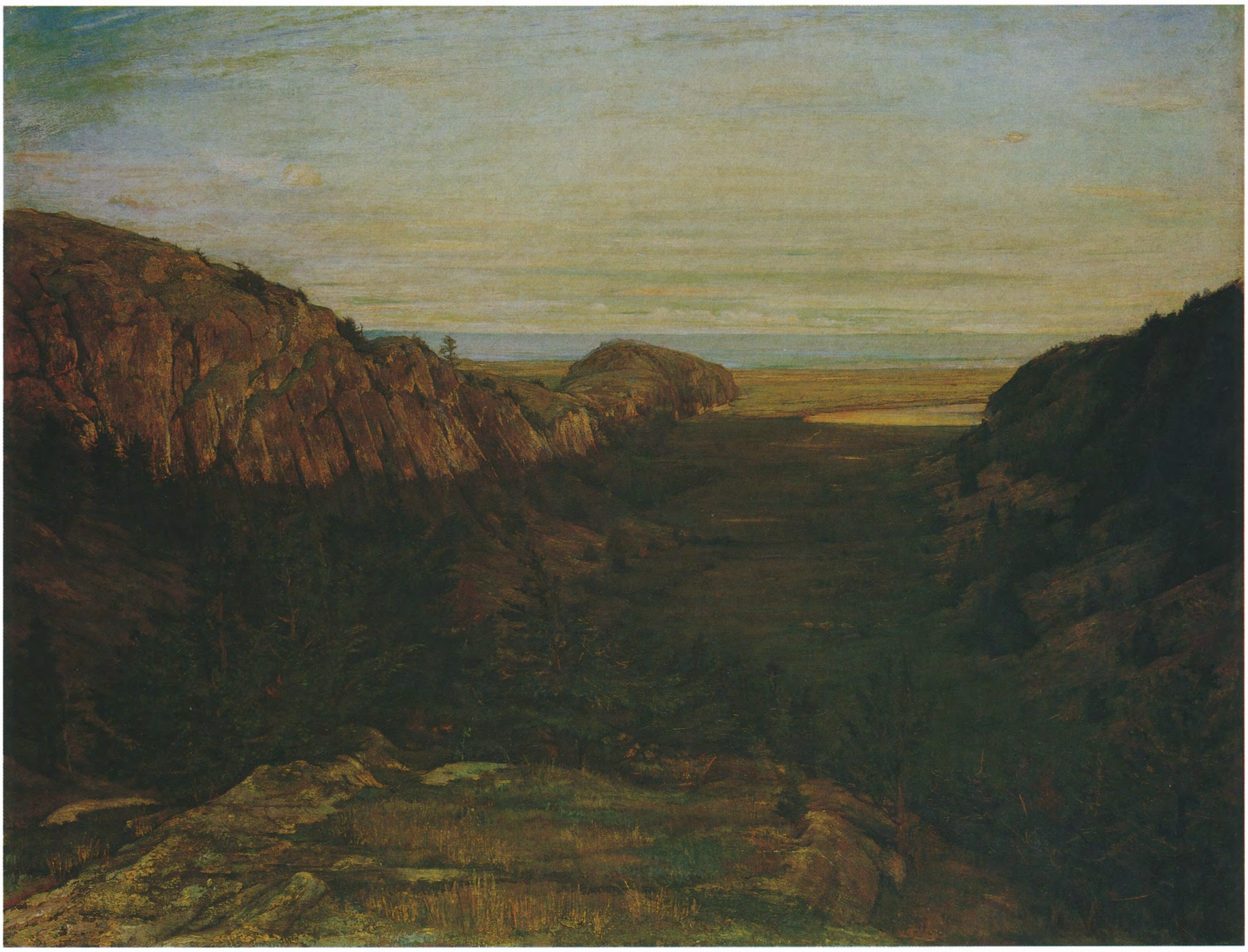


Fig. 1.20. John La Farge, *The Last Valley—Paradise Rocks*, 1867–68. Oil on canvas, 32¾ x 42$\frac{5}{16}$ in. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Though a relatively straightforward rendition of place, factually picturesque, it is utterly unlike any conventional Hudson River School work of the period in its robust yet refined individuality. The overall suggestiveness, the way light and air on the brink of sunset are made palpable, is achieved by laying down a warm ground of reds and slightly cooler blues to establish the light and dark values, into which the cool overtones are added in a meticulous balancing act to achieve a cohesive naturalism. To this end the artist built a painting hut, an outdoor studio on the spot. La Farge noted the persistence required to attain his goal; *The Last Valley* "was painted from Nature, in the same way as the other [*Paradise Valley*], and took a very long time to paint, so as to get the same light as far as possible. By going very frequently—if necessary everyday, and watching for a few minutes, I could get occasionally what I wanted."[67] Technically, La Farge's methodology provided the blueprint for the Tonalist mode, how the vast majority of landscapes were painted under studio conditions over time, synthesizing raw data, memories, and the feelings engendered by place. "The underpainting of the shadows was indeed blue, that of the lights red, and the entire picture was all carefully studied in these balances of tone. Only by such a method could the work go on indefinitely, with continual additions of details, and still remain a simple study of nature."[68] Studied and yet still fresh, the painting is both majestic in terms of place and an inner projection of a profoundly poised consciousness, of deep feelings of attachment and mystery in the face of such serene beauty. *The Last Valley—Paradise Rocks* was featured at the first exhibition of the Society of American Artists in 1878, where it served as an inspiration and standard for the Tonalist landscape as it evolved in the 1880s and beyond.

La Farge's extraordinary period of early creativity at Paradise lasted well into 1870s when he continued to produce exquisite small landscapes and floral still lifes, faithful and yet supremely poetic interpretations of light and color. The intimate oil on panel *Snow Weather*, 1869 (fig. 1.23), is another example of La Farge's mastery of Japanese stylistic strategies integrated into a vernacular, seemingly naïve subject. Here the blurred outlines of evergreens tremble on a tiny expanse of whites brushed over whites and blues, the more creamy pigments barely standing out from the ground of the panel. The delicacy of execution and the surety of touch produce the illusion of wintry atmosphere that

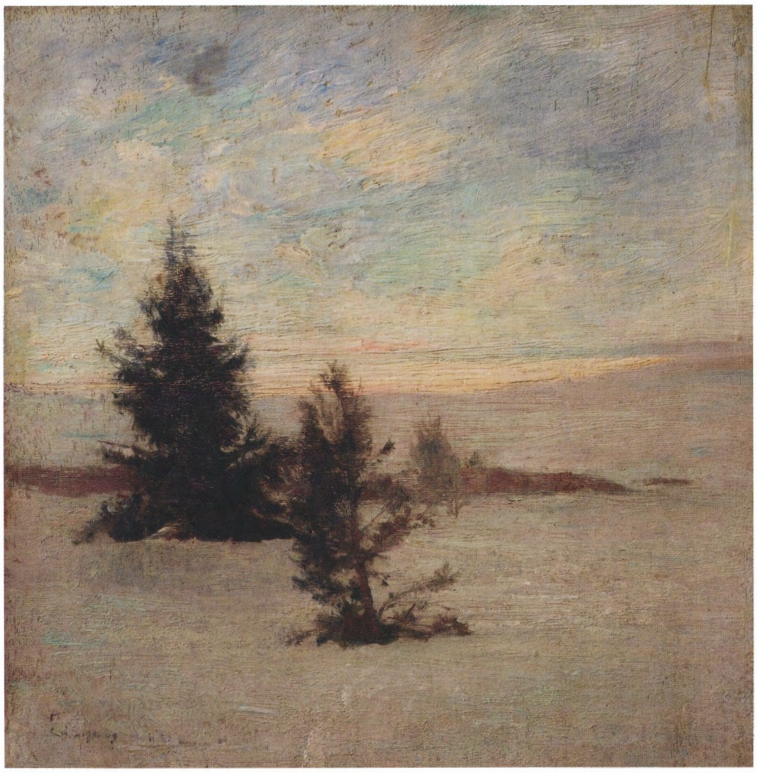


Fig. 1.21. John La Farge, *Snow Weather*, 1869. Oil on wooden panel, 9.5 x 9.3 in. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.

seems more a natural phenomenon than an artistic conceit. Or, as La Farge had pithily noted, "In nature nothing sticks out." The artist allows the warm color of the panel or ground and its surface roughness to bleed through, enhancing the complex motions of the surface pigment and harmonizing the whole, a strategy that Whistler adopted in his pastels of Venice in 1880, and that would subsequently become a ubiquitous style in the work of his numerous American followers. The small-scale intimacy, charm, and breezy sketchiness of *Snow Weather* represents a template for the intimate Tonalist landscape of the 1880s, mirrored in the oil panels of William Merritt Chase, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Ralph Albert Blakelock, among many others.

La Farge's tonal floral still lifes from this period are among the very best of their kind and represent a singular achievement. Like the artist's small landscapes, La Farge was intent on exploring his floral subjects under natural light and from informal and often quirky vantage points. He sometimes let others arrange the flowers for him in front of a window or places exposed to outdoor light, as if this habitual routine, the ordinary of the everyday, was critical to the almost super-naturalistic feeling for form and color he was pursuing. *Calla Lily*, 1862 (fig. 1.22), is a masterful evocation of blurred tonal planes and shadowy lights, of a thing viewed through a lyrical temperament, in which the transitory fragility of the lily in its bower of wildflowers haunts the viewer. The soulful feelings that suffuse La Farge's floral still lifes were noted by many contemporary observers as touching on matters of the spirit. Biographer and critic Royal Cortissoz would write in 1911, "So La Farge painted his flowers, with an indescribable tenderness. His vision pierced deeper than that of the artist who would deal in forthright, domineering fashion with 'things seen.' He could not shake off the glamour of things unseen but felt."[69] La Farge compared the mysterious appeal of his early florals "to certain arrangements of notes of music."[70] He was simply intoxicated by light. From his early oils to his later watercolors and work with opaline stained glass, light—dissected, diffused, analyzed, and refracted into color harmonies and tonal variations—was his guiding passion.

The early landscapes in oil of the 1860s and early 1870s comprise an original and complete body of work that, for various reasons, mostly having to do with a very limited market for his work in those decades (only in Boston was there a ready market for La Farge), La Farge chose not to concentrate on over the remainder of his long career. He increasingly turned to the decorative arts, especially murals and stained glass, and later to his highly regarded watercolors. In 1878 a well-publicized and successful auction of La Farge's works was held in Boston by Pierce and Co., La Farge's primary dealer. Between 1862 and 1879 the artist had exhibited numerous small landscapes and still lifes at the National Academy in New York and although few had found buyers or praise from critics, other artists had certainly taken note. The poetry of his exquisite tonal style filtered into the work of his New York,

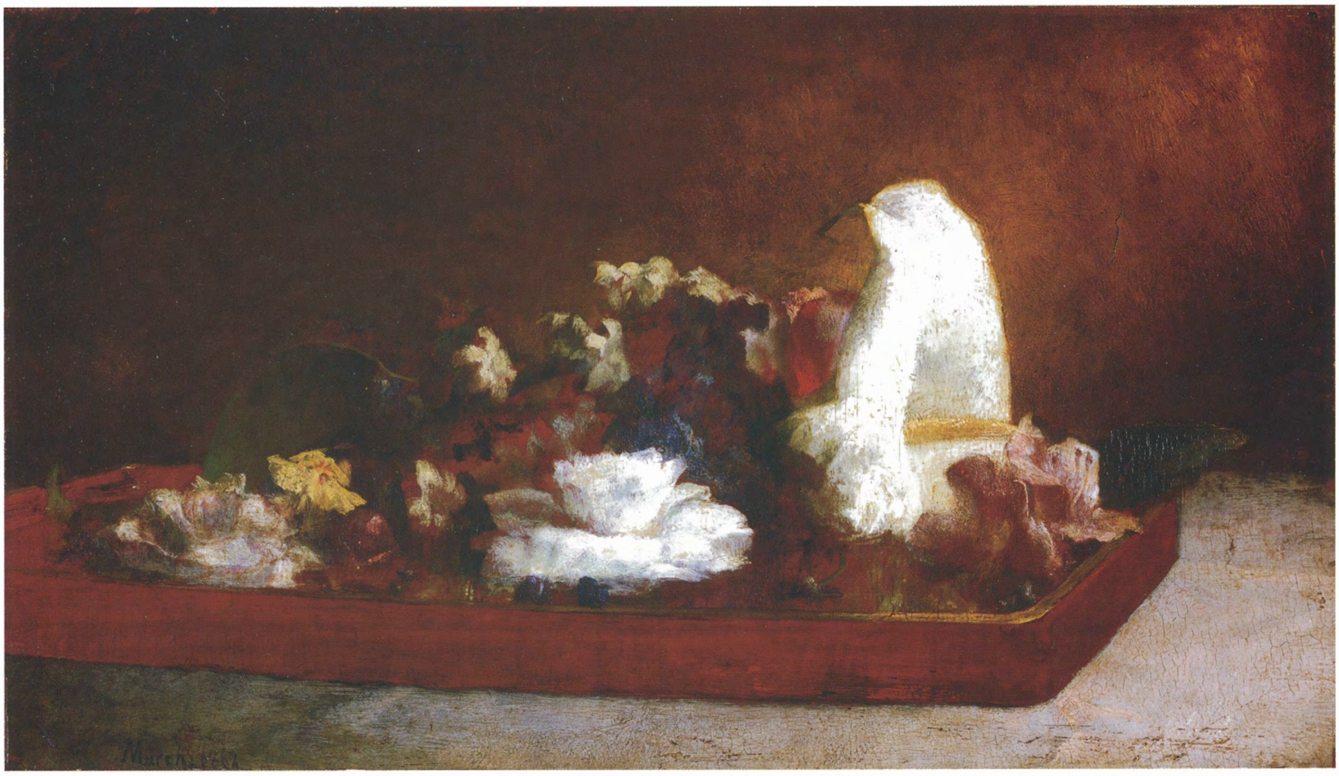
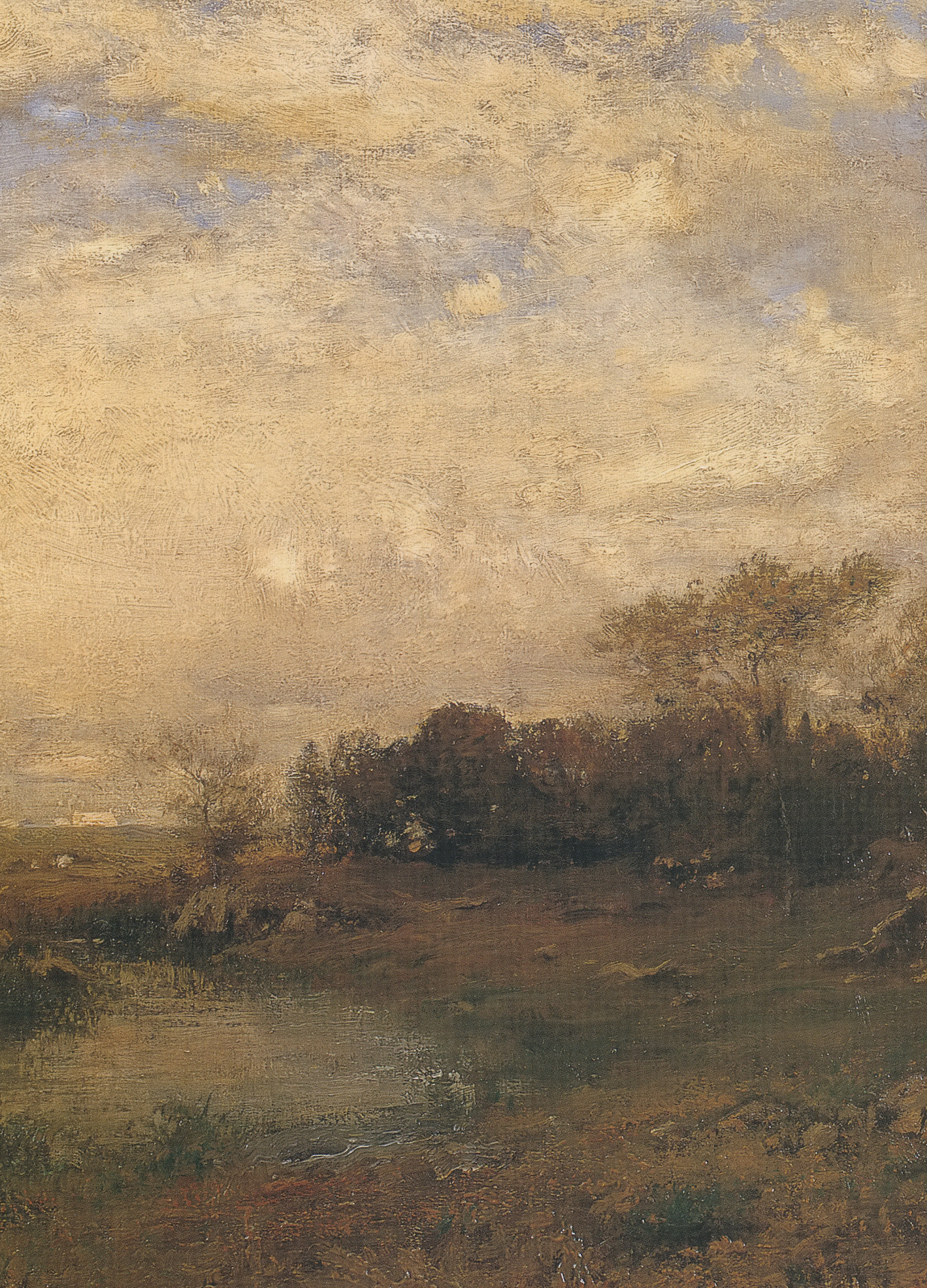


Fig. 1.22. John La Farge, *Calla Lily*, 1862. Oil on panel, 9.1 x 15.7 in. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.

Century Club contemporaries like Homer Dodge Martin and Alexander Wyant—even Inness could not fail to have been moved—all responding in their own way to "the glamour of things unseen but felt."[71] After 1878, La Farge's astute, refined, glowing epiphanies in paint were seized on by the early stalwarts of the Society of American Artists, among them Robert Swain Gifford, William Sartain, Hugh Bolton Jones, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and later Ralph Albert Blakelock.

It is hardly surprising that by 1878 Boston had become enamored of La Farge's landscapes and still lifes. Hunt had done his work well and sophisticated Boston collectors understood and responded to La Farge's exquisite mood-haunted paintings, as they would in later years to his Tonalist watercolors. But even as Boston was nearing the height of its precocious aesthetic stirrings, the tide was turning in New York's favor; the Hudson River School was on the way out and the younger artists returning from Europe were on the rise. If 1878 was an auspicious year for La Farge, it was also an important year for American art. The previous year he and William Morris Hunt had been instrumental in the founding of the Society of American Artists after a dispute with the established National Academy of Design, and in 1878 the society would have its first exhibition, setting the stage for its pioneering exhibitions of avant-garde art for almost three decades. Also in 1878, George Inness was on the verge of finally claiming his place on the New York art-world stage, after battling the Hudson River artists at the National Academy for almost twenty years. In 1878, Inness threw down the gauntlet in his manifesto published in *Harper's Magazine*, calling for an art of poetic truth that awakens emotion and stirs the soul. With Inness on the rise and new figures like John Twachtman, Henry Muhrman, and William Merritt Chase back from Europe, New York would supplant Boston and become the center of progressive art in America. The progressive art that La Farge had been pursuing for almost twenty years had finally come into its own. By virtue of his dedication to his art and his unassuming role in the art politics of his day, La Farge would remain the indispensable player, or as Ernest Knaufft observed in 1907, casting a long backward glance. "John La Farge stands for all that is best in American art. He is the Nestor of our painters. He belongs to three decades. In the old days he fought with Hunt, Inness, Wyant, and Martin to uphold the dignity of our art. When the younger school returned from Munich and Paris, and founded the Society of American Artists, in 1878, [1877] and arrayed themselves against the academy, and fought for recognition of a more individual technique than in vogue, he joined them, and he was president of the Society of American Artists from 1897 to 1906."[72] As will be seen in chapters 4 through 6, when the artist's leadership in New York art circles is touched on and his extraordinary output in watercolor examined, La Farge's influence is ubiquitous, rising to the fore again and again in the formation and triumph of the Tonalist movement.



CHAPTER TWO

A Rising Tide: George Inness, Alexander Wyant, and Homer Dodge Martin

THE FADING OF THE HUDSON RIVER SCHOOL

The Hudson River School Yields to the Tonalist Landscape

By the late 1870s the dominance of the Hudson River School artists in New York was beginning to crumble. William Morris Hunt and John La Farge had been instrumental in developing a taste for a more lyrical, painterly, and intimate landscape art in Boston, and by around 1878 New York, too, was coming around to the new dispensation. George Inness also played a crucial role in developing a taste among collectors for a more poetic and spiritualizing landscape style. As American artists trained abroad began returning to New York, they slowly made inroads into the exhibitions at the National Academy of Design; they challenged the traditionalists with radical styles of painting in both figurative and landscape art. New York, the fast expanding economic powerhouse of the nation—since the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 the city had also become the center of railway and shipping—had been home to artists, collectors, and patrons of the Hudson River School since the 1850s. Many of the landscape men had studios in the Tenth Street Studio Building, including Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, and Martin Johnson Heade, along with La Farge who, since the 1860s, had shared his studio with the mercurial Hudson River School painter Homer Dodge Martin, a convert to Tonalism by the mid-1870s. They were a close-knit establishment, belonging to the same clubs—the august Century Club being the most prominent—and often sharing the same patrons and exhibition venues. The National Academy of Design was their professional association and art school, dedicated to preserving and fostering standards of craftsmanship and promoting members' work in annual exhibitions. Founded in 1825, the National Academy was modeled on the Royal Academy in London; by the 1850s and 1860s its exhibitions were packed almost exclusively with Hudson River landscapes. If Boston looked to Paris as a tastemaker, New York looked to London, to the spectacles of Turner, the truth-in-telling-details of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and the virtuous admonitions of John Ruskin. Düsseldorf had been the training ground for many of the Hudson River artists. When change came to New York, it tended to manifest itself in the formation of new institutions that challenged the monopoly of the old order; in the 1870s, opposition to the Hudson River painters coalesced in the formation of the Art Students League in 1875, and then in the founding of the Society of American Artists in 1877. The National Academy's domination of teaching and exhibiting ended. Boston, too, played a role, for as Boston's economic power declined relative to New York's, so its progressive intellectual and cultural talent infiltrated the New York arts scene; Boston-oriented artists, critics, and writers slowly but surely undermined the status of the Hudson River painters. Boston never could abide the literalism of the Hudson River School and soon New York followed suit.

OPPOSITE: Alexander Wyant. *A Wayside Pool*, c. 1880s (detail of fig. 2.36).

As early as 1864, the Boston critic and art writer James Jackson Jarves had criticized the Hudson River artists for their panoramic extravaganzas, which he felt distanced the viewer from the felt life at the center of the art experience, while their excessive detail only reminded the viewer that he was looking at a topographic rendering. Jarves had much praise, though, for one New Yorker, George Inness—who at the time was working in the Boston suburb of Medfield—especially for his more subjective landscape art, which had the effect of sinking "the artist and spectator alike into the scene. It becomes the real, and, in that sense, true realistic art.... The spectator is no longer a looker-on, as in the other style [Hudson River], but an inhabitant of the landscape. He enjoys it with the right of ownership ... not as a stranger who for a fee [probably a reference to Frederic Church, who charged a fee to view his extravaganzas] is permitted to look at what he is by its very nature debarred from entering and possessing....The idea should be so treated, in accordance with the requirements of beauty, as to absorb the spectator primarily into the subject."[1]

Twenty years after Jarves's praise for Inness's subjective poetics, the aging Hudson River artists had fallen from favor. Increasingly, artists like Church, Albert Bierstadt, Sanford Robinson Gifford, John Frederick Kensett, and Martin Johnson Heade, as well as the godfathers of the Hudson River School, Thomas Cole and Asher B. Durand (figs. 2.1–2.6) were dismissed, disparaged, and ultimately forgotten. As will be seen, the seismic shift that occurred in the 1870s had as much to do with the exhaustion of one school as the onslaught of a more dynamic and radical new school. The result was a groundswell of changing tastes and a fundamental alteration in how people responded to art: a mix of European sophistication and changing American demands for a national art that

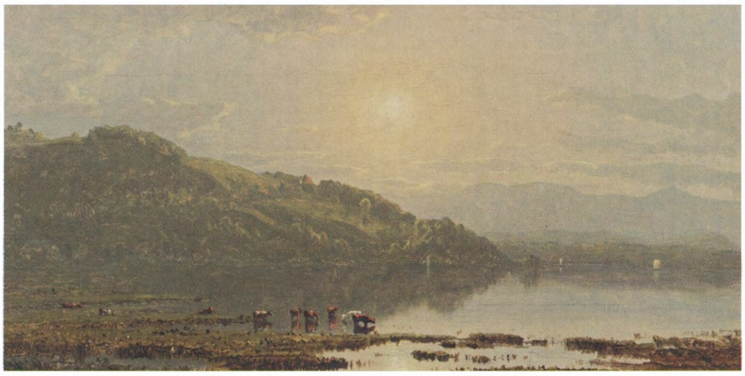


Fig. 2.1. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Mount Merino*, c. 1851–67. Oil on canvas, 7⅝ x 14⁹⁄₁₆ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

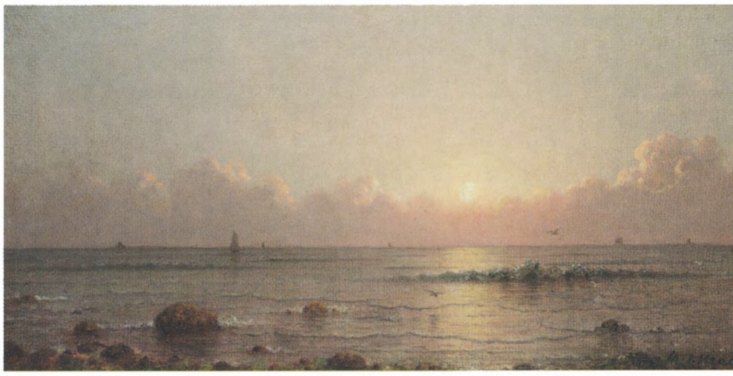


Fig. 2.2. Martin Johnson Heade, *Seascape at Sunset*, c. mid-1860s. Oil on canvas, 10¼ x 20⅜ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

reflected post–Civil War American spiritual values. These new tastes and market demands also affected genre painters, like Winslow Homer, as critics and buyers became less enamored of storytelling pictures. It is difficult for us today, after the full blown revival of the Hudson River School—as well as its meteoric prices in the marketplace—to gauge its earlier fall from grace. But an understanding of its demise, especially from a contemporary vantage point, allows an unparalleled insight into just what was radical and distinctive in the rise of Tonalism, the movement that would so completely vanquish the old Hudson River School artists.

Contemporary Critiques of the Hudson River School

In 1864, the Bostonian John Bancroft, a friend of John La Farge and a fellow collector of Japanese prints, wrote to his father about an exhibition of work by Elihu Vedder and La Farge in Boston, drawing an invidious comparison between their work and that of New York artist Frederic Edwin Church: "... they [Vedder and La Farge] are the only true painters in New York. Fashion rules otherwise, but mark their future. I would fain believe what you write about Church's *Chimborazo*, but I can hardly think that the painter who exhibited the emptiness of the falling of *Niagara* and the falsities of *Cotopaxi* last winter, and whose vulgarity of mind and willful blindness to truth I have lately seen fill a small edition on canvas, should have found truth within a year."[2] The vehemence of Bancroft's harsh accusation is startling, especially directed at an artist like Church and his Hudson River brethren, artists who practically made a fetish out of rendering truth to nature. But Bancroft, La Farge, and their circles of Boston sophisticates had a very different idea of truth; theirs was a subjective truth interpreted through an artistic temperament. Feeling interpreted through paint, not facts, was what mattered; Emerson had made this patently clear to the New England mind in his essay *Nature*, written in the 1840s. Church, perhaps more than any other mid-nineteenth century artist, focused on the quasi-scientific and exact rendering of fact, filling his sometimes enormous canvases with painstakingly recorded details of geologic formations, of flora and fauna in which every leaf on every tree, flower, and plant is exquisitely rendered, along with every sunset note on each and every serried cloud, or the coruscation of a million ripples in Niagara Falls. For decades, Church amazed his public who paid to view his realistic extravaganzas from New York to London. He was probably the only American painter admired by the British artist, writer, and theorist John Ruskin for his meticulous attention to detail, mirroring the prevailing pre-Raphaelite mode then ensconced at the Royal Academy in London. It was this mid-Victorian art of narrative shibboleths that James Abbott McNeill Whistler, as early as 1865, was already fulminating against, culminating in his infamous libel action against Ruskin in 1878.

Church was the sole pupil, and a loyal one, of Asher B. Durand, who had studied with Thomas Cole, the godfather of American landscape painting and the Hudson River School. It was Cole who had first developed the vogue for expansive picturesque landscapes of the wild Catskill region. Cole recorded the natural world precisely as he had witnessed it, initially in faithfully recorded sketches, and later in finished studio landscapes. Today, Cole and his followers like Durand, Kensett, and Church are acknowledged for their descriptive power and pictorial finesse, and for the way they echoed and transformed long-standing European traditions of classic landscapes derived from the formulas of Salvatore Rosa and Claude Lorrain, and later the theatrical "machines" of Turner. The literary inspirations for their panoramic spectaculars are also acknowledged today, especially the tradition of the sublime derived from British sources such as the work of John Milton and Edmund Burke who first catalogued the sensations produced by natural visions of grandeur. These geologic and meteorological wonders might be mysterious and even terrifying; darkness, thunder, vastness, obscurity, the "bawling" of cataracts, and the peaks and crevasses of vast mountain ranges were only some of the well-rehearsed tropes of the genre. This fundamentally narrative or literary mode became extrapolated in the works of the Hudson River School, though translated to

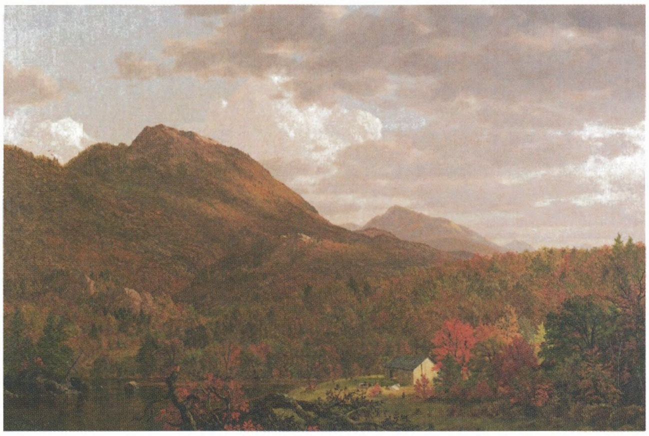


Fig. 2.3. Frederic Edwin Church, *Autumn*, 1853. Oil on canvas, 20¼ x 30⅜ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

less abstract epiphanies that had more to do with nationalistic fervor and pride in the yet unspoiled virgin landscape of America. Cole and Durand had first found inspiration in the Catskill Mountains and their followers moved farther afield, to the Adirondacks and the Rockies, and eventually to the distant Amazon and Arctic. By the 1860s and 1870s the Hudson River picturesque formulas, again derived from British academic sources, were somewhat tamed to include romantic scenes of the nearby American landscape along the East Coast and its inland waterways. Artists like Fitz Henry Lane, Kensett, and Heade were painting harbors and rivers filled with luminous light, evoking stillness and rapture, which emotionally set the stage for the more intimate landscapes of the Tonalists in the following decades.

For New York's prominent merchant class, the Hudson River School pictures represented both a God-given paradise to be relished and the breathless expectations engendered by an expansive continent yet to be tamed—and exploited; these vast expanses of wilderness were visions of Manifest Destiny incarnate. From the painters' viewpoint, and that of their public and critics, the work of the Hudson River artists was of value because of the profound truths they embodied: a precisely accurate rendition of God's creation, all bathed in a celestial radiance that mirrored the hopes and aspirations of the young nation. The Hudson River men were so avid in their recording of these visual truths that they labored assiduously to remove themselves from their creation, merging their brushstrokes seamlessly into an unbroken smooth surface, and achieving a high degree of finish—the better to allow the splendor of creation to shine through. Considered from the perspective of more than a century's distance, the greatest Hudson River paintings seem to depict a young nation's first love, a prelapsarian innocence—a majestic truth of a kind—before the Civil War and the social and economic upheavals in its wake took their toll.

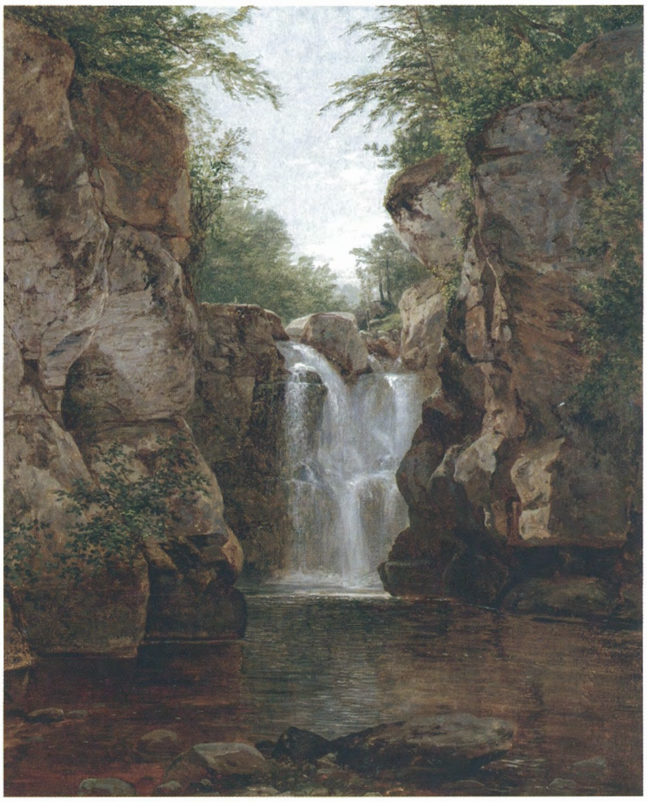


Fig. 2.4. John Frederick Kensett, *Fawn's Leap* (formerly *Bash Bish Falls*). Oil on canvas, 22 x 18 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

The artist and historian Samuel Isham, writing about Cole in 1905, noted, "Cole strove to achieve high moral objects though his art. It was to suggest profitable musings on the grandeur and decline of nations, the transitoriness of human life, the rewards of virtue after death."[3] Isham, however, found Cole's allegories to be false, artificial, and conventional, though he esteemed his pure landscape painting for its sincerity. The critic and historian Charles Caffin in his influential *Story of American Painting* of 1907 wrote of Cole, "Possessing a religious and romantic temperament, a student of Bunyan and Sir Walter Scott, he yielded to the stronger influences of the time, which, as we have seen, were literary, didactic, and oratorical, rather than pictorial. . . . The total effect is in consequence bombastic and the details pitifully weak."[4] He found Cole's progeny, Thomas Moran, Church, and Bierstadt, inclined to be preoccupied with the grandiose and with bigness for bigness's sake. In a word, they had become clichés. Even though he thought Church's approach fundamentally unsound, Isham found much to admire in the artist, especially his facility with detail, calling it "amazingly clever . . . brilliant handling"—no one in his day could match it. But Isham bemoaned Church's idea, received from Cole, "that a picture should be grander, more ennobling than a mere transcript of everyday nature, and that the way to produce this effect was not by a deeper feeling expressed through the artistic means of line, color, and composition, but by a choice of nobler subjects. The idea is unsound, but it has not always been as universally rejected as to-day."[5] Of Bierstadt, Isham wrote: "His smaller pictures are interesting and clever,

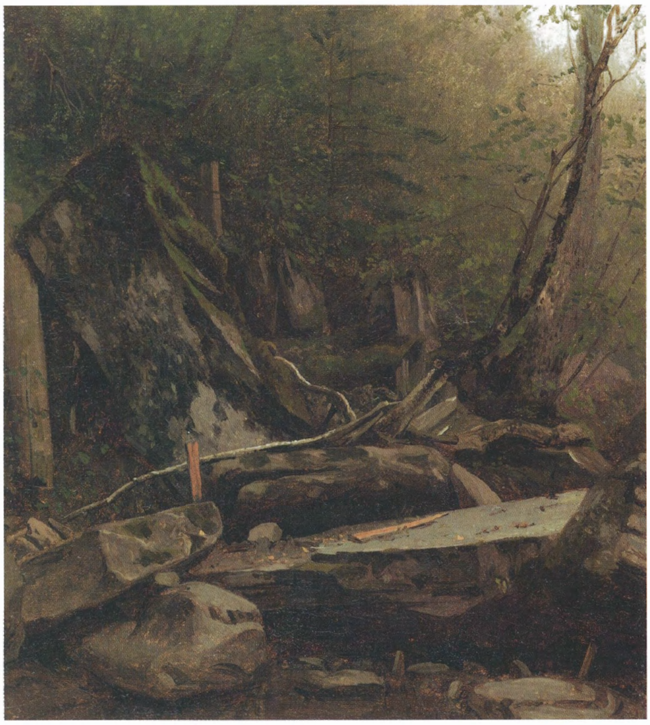


Fig. 2.5. Sanford Robinson Gifford, *A Study of Rocks*. Oil on canvas, 9⁹⁄₁₆ x 8¹⁄₁₆ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

but the huge canvases which made his reputation are but a sort of scene painting, superficial, exaggerated, filled with detail imperfectly understood. Every ingredient of the work, composition, color, mountain peaks, waterfalls, clouds, sky, rocks, trees, underbrush, are all done with an exasperating, a monotonous ability up to a certain degree of excellence beyond which nothing goes. There is a dullness and mechanical quality to it all."[6]

Charles Caffin echoed the criticism in his analysis of Durand and his follower Kensett: "[W]hat they lacked was skill in the craftsmanship of painting and the painter's point of view. These men looked on nature with an eye at once too niggling and too comprehensive."[7] Caffin attributed much of Durand and Kensett's failings to their background as engravers and a fondness for descriptive line. In demonstrating the failings of Durand and the Hudson River School, Caffin offers a superb analysis of the radical stylistic innovations learned in the European ateliers by the young American artists in the 1870s; his critique is a virtual manifesto of the Tonalist movement.

". . . The landscape by Durand is too big in size and too extensive in subject to be embraced by a single vision. The eye wanders over it, as it would in presence of the original scene, receiving a number of enjoyable impressions, but no impression of unity and completeness. Lacking these qualities, which are the result of selection, simplification, and organic arrangement, the subject is not so much pictorial as panoramic and topographical. It represents the ordinary way of looking at the landscape rather than the artist's way. In the second place there is an absence of synthesis, that is to say, of a summarizing of essentials, in the actual representation of the details. A uniformly patient and conscientious putting together of little effects is spread like a network over the whole; the painter has not grasped the salient characteristics of the whole or its parts, has not enforced these and subordinated the rest. The result is, that his trees and mountains do not assert themselves as masses, but invite attention to the infinite, niggling strokes of which they are composed, and this is partly the cause and partly the effect of the way in which the brush was handled. . . . It was not until later, when Americans came in touch with the Barbizon men and learned from them how to look at nature, how to select from it and compose the essentials into a picture, and how to paint with a full, firm brush in masses, that landscape painting, as distinct from mere representation of landscape, commenced in this country . . . when our painters begin to concern themselves with the moods of nature, the reflection in the latter of their own moods. This consciousness of self and need of self-expression represent an older, if not necessarily a maturer, habit of mind—a product of the effort everywhere to realize and emphasize the individual."[8]

Caffin's championing of individualism is a reflection of the invigorated literary and religious culture coming out of New England from mid-century on, the self-reliant all-American ethos of Emerson and the subjective eye of Thoreau. Encapsulated in Caffin's discussion is a distinction between the truth to nature of the Hudson River School and the truth of the inner artistic vision of the Tonalist movement, a reflection of the individual creator, rather than a fastidious representation of a manifestly divine truth. Asher B. Durand had succinctly described his creed: "That is a fine picture which at once takes possession of you—draws you into it—you traverse it—breathe its atmosphere—feel its sunshine, and you repose in its shade without thinking of its design, execution, effect, or color."[9] Durand wanted a window onto nature, minutely designed to allow the observer an imaginative stroll in meandering diagonals from foreground to middle to background. For the likes of Hunt, La Farge, Inness, and the shock troops of young men from the European ateliers, the only window that mattered was the subjective viewpoint and its expression. The Hudson River artists were not just out of fashion but backward looking and out of the mainstream of international art. They relied on narrative and literary sources; they painted big to impress with size; their fondness for verisimilitude was pedantic, dull, and fussy in excessive detail; they were defective in the most basic crafts of composition and pictorial organization, and so lacking dramatic focus and unity of form; and worst of all, their truth was boring and sentimental—charmless. True sentiment, as opposed to sentimentality, was an expression of deep feeling, a poetic transcription of mood. In 1875, Henry James in a review of some vast panoramic Hudson River pictures, wrote: "They take up so much space on the walls; but they have taken little (and even that we grudge them) in our recollections."[10] In addition, the growth of photography after the Civil War and the ability of the lens to capture detail in scale both large and small made the true-to-life renditions of the Hudson River School seem more redundant and outmoded than ever. By 1879, George Inness could write, "Certain members of the National Academy of Design have been stigmatized... as the Hudson River School.... It is true that scenic art can never assume to be a representative of the higher forms of mind."[11] Inness found the fading art of the Hudson River painters too intellectual, too enamored of the "detailism" of the Pre-Raphaelites, and thus lacking the spiritual incisiveness which allowed the true artist to delve into the unseen beauty of God's handiwork.

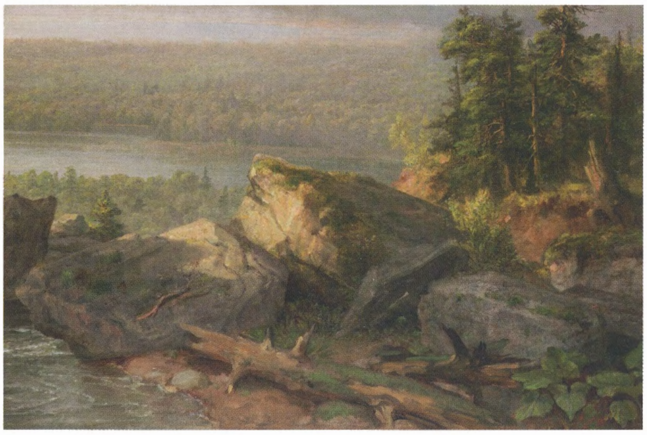


Fig. 2.6. Asher B. Durand, *Schroon Lake*. Oil on canvas, 16⅛ x 24 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

Luminist Light and Tonalist Light

Modern art historians from the 1960s on have come to read the Hudson River School as a particular expression of American artistic values from the Jacksonian era through the Civil War years and just beyond. These artists' subtle depiction of a cool and radiant sunlight—Luminist light—has resulted in the coining of the term "Luminism" or "Luminist school" to describe this style and type of painting. The artists most often cited as part of the Luminist tradition are Martin Johnson Heade (1819–1904), Fitz Henry Lane (1801–65), and John F. Kensett (1816–72), along with Sanford Robinson Gifford, Frederic Church, and others who often ventured into the Luminist realm of crystalline sunlight and wide horizontal formats. These Luminist painters broke with the early Hudson River School emphasis on literary and narrative references to produce a purer landscape art embedded in the reality of the experience of American light and the life of the people, commercial and otherwise.

In the great Luminist paintings of the 1850s by Heade, Kensett, Lane, and Gifford, which portray something of the expansive optimism of the Jacksonian era, many depicting scenes along the Newport–Narragansett coastline as far north as Mount Desert Island, or the waters of Lake George, the light, according to art historian Barbara Novak, tends to a crisp encompassing radiance that infuses every element in the landscape. "Luminist light tends to be cool, not hot, hard not soft, palpable rather than fluid, planar rather than atmospherically diffuse. Luminist light radiates, gleams, and suffuses on a different frequency than atmospheric light. With atmospheric light, which is essentially painterly ad optical, air circulates between particles of strokes. Air cannot circulate between the particles of matter that compromise luminist light. Luminist radiance occurs not because of interactions, overlaps, and dissolutions of stroke, but because of minute tonal modulations, nearly invisible when viewed close-up. From a distance, the coalescence of these tonalities mimics the effect of radiant light and negates the idea of paint."[12] Novak enumerates a range of other characteristics for Luminist landscape painting: a structure that stresses the horizontal and a measured recession into space; an abstract or ideal order that imposes a kind of mathematical or geometric regularity as opposed to the organic; a tradition of planar emphasis that keeps the viewer aware of surface in the painting; the absence of visible brushstroke, specifically, a rejection of a painterly or gestural application of pigment, thereby removing the signature of the artist and adding to the transcendental expression in which man the creator is simply a naked eyeball, a near-anonymous transmitter of natural glory. An important aspect of the Luminist style, according to Novak, is silence: "Luminist silence, like Luminist time, depends on measured control. Without movement between strokes or between units of form, we hear nothing."[13]

As will be seen in the development of the "classic" Tonalist landscape, much of what is characteristic of Luminist style, was jettisoned by the Tonalists, those who, like Homer Martin and Alexander Wyant, moved away from the Hudson River School, and certainly those who returned from Europe wearing their atelier training on their sleeve. American light, especially the bright glare of broad daylight, was rarely congenial to the Tonalists, who preferred dawn and dusk, or the pearlescent light and the overcast skies many had become enamored of in Europe, especially those who had spent time in the American art colonies in Brittany and Normandy, where they had first learned plein-air techniques. The kind of horizontal compositions, favored by Lane and Kensett in particular, of coastal views with broad reflective bands of water mirroring sometimes serene, sometimes stormy skies, in which prevailing light is intensified in an overall sheen, was not adopted by most Tonalists, who leaned toward a more intimate enclosed landscapes rather than the expansive horizons of Luminist renderings. Nor would storms or grandiloquent cloud arrangements become the favored motifs, although George Inness in the 1870s and the 1880s produced some superb storm paintings. The Tonalists preferred small pools—riversides, stream banks, lake edges, tiny ponds, and even puddles—in their enclosed landscapes as a way of bringing reflective light out of the sky into the landscape. There, refracted off a calm watery surface, the misted light modifies the surrounding local colors and super-saturates the atmosphere. Thus Tonalist light is more atmospheric than radiant, glowing from within rather than without, less celestial and more terrestrial—a subjective reflection of human mood rather than divine benignity. Tonalist light is soft and fluid and sumptuous, echoing Constable's soft, saturated grays. Unlike the high finish and precision of Luminism, most Tonalists produced their effects with broadly brushed pigments that fully display their dexterous handling of medium; a unique and expressive signature style of facture was very much de rigueur. Vibration and refraction of light, the sensation of movement even in stillness, produced by the carefully applied tones of complementary or analogous colors side by side is fundamental to the Tonalist canon. The overall effect of a Tonalist canvas is of expressive color-laden light, of cool greens, grays, blues, and mauves that pulse with an inner energy, a force that is as much the projection of the power of a singular vision as the record of perceived light

The Tonalist predilection for moonlights and nocturnes, the moods of autumn and winter, relatively rare in the Luminist canon, speaks of a fondness for dreamy and haunting light, a pale and spare silvery illumination in which landscape forms are silhouetted and the more general details are merged in an indistinct moiré stain. Tonalist light is fundamentally a projection of inner feeling. It is also just one of many design tools. Patterning with lights and darks (values), often in a completely artificial manner to produce decorative unity, is found repeatedly in Tonalism. The negative spaces, especially the lighted voids between trees and branches—eyelets and keyholes—are not merely decorative, but radiate and infuse surrounding forms with sumptuous color, heightening the ambiguity of form and enhancing the flatness of the composition. Ralph Albert Blakelock was a master at playing with negative and positive space, often using light sources to confound traditional ways of perception and accepted concepts of pictorial recession. In short, Tonalist light is all about color and analogous color modulations that give the effect of soft natural light, but that, in fact, are only another formal element at the artist's disposal. And though the inspiration for Tonalist light might have been recorded plein air, taken down in notes and sketches, the finished work is one of synthesis, working through memory and imagination and accomplished in the studio. In many respects, Tonalist light is memory incarnate, memory filtered, memory infused, while the use of memory, the perfection of memory to render specific qualities of light, was considered both a practical skill—something Whistler prided himself on—and a necessary discipline of the professional artist. Perhaps the greatest exponent of Tonalist light—certainly the most versatile in exploiting the feelings it engendered—was George Inness, who ceaselessly explored nuances of tone and expressive form to elucidate the unseen powers of the landscape before him.

George Inness (1825–94)

The paramount difficulty with the artist is to bring his intellect to submit to the fact that there is such a thing as the indefinable—that which hides itself that we may feel after it. . . . But God is always hidden, and beauty depends upon the unseen—the visible upon the invisible. —George Inness, 1882[14]

George Inness is a towering one-of-a-kind romantic figure in American art (fig. 2.7). Among the first-generation Tonalists, only John La Farge and Whistler shared a similar innovative talent, though their work lacked the fiery spiritual nature and visionary impulse at the heart of Inness. Alexander Wyant and Homer Dodge Martin, who emerged out of the Hudson River School, showed poignant flashes of Inness's darker moods, and of the second-generation Tonalists, only the shamanistic poetry of Albert Pinkham Ryder and the shimmering moonlights of Ralph Albert Blakelock approximated the spirit-haunted dreamscapes of Inness. Although he was born in Newburgh, in upstate New York, and resided in New Jersey and New York City most of his life, Inness was imbued with a New England Transcendentalist temperament that conceived all life's means as existential ends. Twice he moved to Medfield near Boston where some of his early breakthroughs occurred. Inness was, in fact, a born radical, always going against the grain in pursuit of his goal of rendering visible a spiritual state of being in

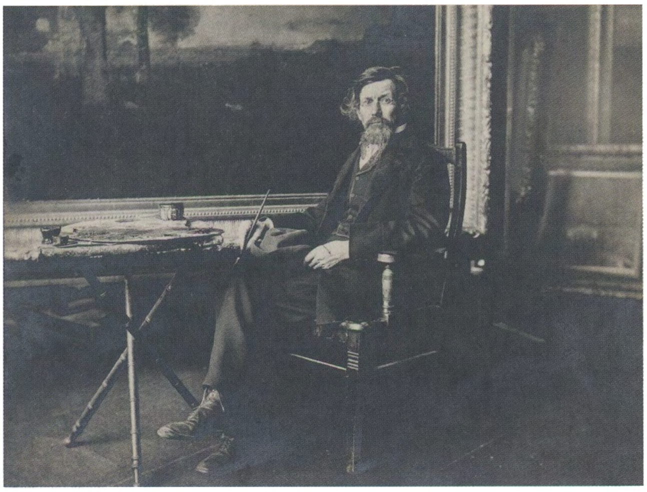


Fig. 2.7. George Inness, photographed c. 1890. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

landscape. Like Hunt, La Farge, and Whistler, he spent much of his career confronting the art establishment—in Inness's case, the Hudson River School painters in New York—while forging his distinctive style of spiritualizing color and emotive tone on canvas. Although never a Hudson River School artist per se, Inness could on occasion appease the New York critics with his own approximations of the style and retained something of the older school's penchant for panoramic vistas and narrative detail. When he bowed to prevailing taste it was almost always out of financial necessity. The Hudson River School artists dominated the New York art world throughout the early part of his career, and it was Inness's synthetic style of post-Barbizon landscape—and that of his followers, both indigenous and foreign-trained—that ultimately triumphed and sidelined Frederic Edwin Church and his contemporaries. In a sense, Inness was always a Tonalist: after being first intrigued by old-master chiaroscuro and Titian's golden tonalities, he then moved on to his own brand of hybrid Barbizon naturalism infused with soft painterly tones, and finally to his distinctive late style of synthetic-expressive Tonalism, which relied on painstakingly composed middle-toned harmonies for the spiritual unity he sought.

As early as 1884, Inness had been described by a critic as a Tonalist,[15] although in a wider sense he was often thought of as a colorist, aligned with La Farge and Hunt in his emphasis on composing with color, as opposed to line and form. Inness was never satisfied merely to record the relevant facts of the scene before him; he preferred to pick and choose motifs, the forms of landscape ever at his fingertips, to filter, rearrange, and synthesize, thus achieving in paint the tremulous approximation of the idea or emotion he wished to communicate. By late in his life, Inness, though never completely abandoning the invigorating experience of plein-air painting, was working almost entirely out of memory in the studio. Harmonious and unifying tone—and unity of effect—was something he constantly struggled to obtain, with, as he noted, just enough detail or contrasts to keep his canvases interesting. For Inness, the key to success was the direct channeling onto canvas of the artist's controlling passion. This expressive fervor reached a crescendo in his late work as a result of his readiness to arrange and edit his landscape elements at will, a reductive strategy that only increased the ultimate carrying power of the picture. He composed as much with ideas and memory as with his eye, which is to say that his eye was informed by a subjective power that sought translation in the visible world. Or, as Emerson observed: "The sensual man conforms thoughts to things; the poet conforms things to his thoughts. The one esteems nature as rooted and fast; the other, as fluid, and impresses his being thereon. To him, the refractory world is ductile and flexible; he invests dust and stones with humanity. . . ."[16]

No artist invested the landscape with his metamorphic soul more fully than George Inness. According to his son, once in his Montclair or New York City studio, Inness's serenity and acuity of observation could turn into physical and mental anguish as he strove to interpret the vision that played in his mind and give it life on canvas. "When he painted he painted at white heat. Passionate, dynamic in his force, I have seen him sometimes like a madman, stripped to the waist, perspiration rolling like a mill-race from his face, with some tremendous idea struggling for expression. After a picture was complete it lost all value for him. He had no more interest in it. What was the masterpiece one day would be 'dish-water' and 'twaddle' the next. He would take a canvas before the paint was really dry, and, being seized with another inspiration, would paint over it. I have known him to paint as many as half a dozen or more pictures on one canvas, in fact, as many as the canvas would hold."[17] Inness biographer and fellow Tonalist painter Elliott Daingerfield wrote of Inness, "The greatest of his pictures were painted out of what people fondly call his imagination, his memory—painted within the four walls of a room, away from and without reference to any particular nature; for he himself was nature. . . . His eyes burned like fire when in coal and red-hot; he looked through the blank canvas, through the besmeared paint, through the days and hours of work, to that vision which was within himself, and that alone was his goal, and no likeness of any place or thing tempted him aside."[18]

Like Emerson before him, Inness was galvanized by Swedenborgian ideas from the 1860s on; what he found in nature was only the tantalizing simulacrum of the glorious spirit-filled landscape that existed beyond the visible spectrum of light. He was forever probing for the unseen, in a sense attempting to freeze-frame the metamorphic pulse of nature. This deeply mystical strain in his temperament found the artist in near constant agitation as he tried to peer behind the veil of reality to approximate some deeper truth, the truth harbored within the material world but not of it. He was continually frustrated by the difficulty of elucidating the valence between objective reality and subjective vision through the medium of paint. Form, color, and analogous tone were, for Inness, a language unto themselves, not unlike the syntax of poetry. Melodic structure, rhythm, cadence, and harmonic unity (often based in arcane mathematics) constituted the scientific principles, at least in Inness's mind, that he sought to impose on the facts of nature. In this, as Inness told his son, he saw himself working the same line as the composer and poet.

"Now we'll put a dab of dark here and light over there. Just like music, George—the harmony of tone. We thump, thump, thump the keys to the distance, but don't forget to put in the harsh note, the accidental. It makes the contrast that gives interest and beauty to the whole, the gradation of light and shade which corresponds to music. What it art anyway? Nothing but temperament, expression of your feelings."[19]

The young George Inness spent his formative years in the then small town of Newark, New Jersey, near the still unspoiled Passaic River and Hackensack meadows. This marshy landscape blossoming with flowers in the spring, with magnificent oaks, beeches, elms, and maples on its outskirts, most likely impressed itself on the young artist, according to turn-of-the-century art historian Frank Jewett Mather, who knew Inness's New Jersey countryside well. "It was then a farming country broken into glades and hillocks, offering juxtaposition of left-over forest trees with orchards or pasture—an agreeable, intimate, half-tamed landscape, with plentiful reminders of its primitive solemnity. The love of this sort of landscape beauty is the single permanent characteristic of our most versatile and volatile painter."[20] As a young man, Inness enjoyed fairly prosperous mercantile surroundings; his father and his brothers were successful small-time businessmen. Inness, however, was drawn—obsessively by all accounts—to artistic pursuits from an early age and retained throughout his life a suspicion, if not dislike, for business and crass moneymaking; the business side of art was for him an infernal agony. Attracted to prints of old master paintings in his student years, his first successful forays into landscape betray his fascinations with old-master, especially Claudian, schemes of composition and the rhythmic natural forms of the seventeenth-century Dutch landscapists. Already, in his first exhibited landscapes at the National Academy of Design, Inness displayed an attitude contrary to the prevailing styles of Cole and Durand; his landscapes were pastoral rather than wilderness, his compositions generalized and lacking the distracting detail of the typical Hudson River School product, and filled with motifs and tonality derived from the old masters. For this he was roundly criticized, along with his proclivity to reduce and modify the natural colors of a landscape "to a tone of color."[21] In a day when truth to nature was the ideal of Durand and Kensett, what were referred to as Inness's artificial "studio concoctions"—art derived from art and not nature, according to the critics—went against the grain. The Tonalist in Inness was deep rooted, as a New York critic in 1853 noted: "In the other pictures from Mr. Inness's [*sic*] hand, he seems to have sacrificed effect to his great love of mere tone. In this respect he will find that TIME, a greater toner than he, will entirely obliterate them. They are too much like the 'old masters' for a 'young master.' Kept up a little higher, they would 'go down' much better."[22] Throughout the 1850s, Inness could pacify New York critics by steering close to the second-generation Hudson River styles of Frederic Edwin Church and Sanford Robinson Gifford, although always merging with his more painterly and tonal idiom. His richly atmospheric renditions and obvious talent won him patrons, even in hidebound New York, and a growing following in Boston, which would include Quincy Adams Shaw (who owned at least one Inness by 1859), a Harvard classmate of Hunt and fanatic collector of Millet. In fact, by 1875 Inness's quirks as a landscape stylist were so identified with Boston that a writer for the *Chicago Tribune* noted: "It is almost a matter of course that the highest appreciation of Inness should come from Boston, for it is in Boston that they understand strange and unaccountable things, and we know not how it happened that Inness was born down at Newburgh, N.Y."[23] Although Inness continued to confound New York critics right into the 1880s—they were often shocked and jarred by his unconventional compositions and expressive pigment—his individual ingenuity could not fail to impress even the traditionally minded, and in 1853 he landed an associate membership in the National Academy, becoming a full member in 1868. Much of the early support Inness did enjoy in New York came from collectors in the circle of Brooklyn celebrity preacher Henry Ward Beecher, who patronized Inness by 1856, and remained a formidable religious influence on Inness from 1858 to 1863.

In 1853–54, Inness made his second trip to Europe and spent time in Paris studying the Barbizon masters. At about this time, William Morris Hunt was studying with Millet and was in and out of Paris, where he retained a studio. It is possible that Hunt and Inness met in either Paris or Barbizon. Inness's short exposure to the Barbizon painters in the 1850s may not have had an immediate impact, but it sowed the seeds of future ventures into painterly naturalism. Unlike Hunt who spent more than a decade studying abroad—and years more shedding European influence—Inness was probably well served by his brief sojourns to Europe; he remained largely unencumbered by the emotional investment in time and energy that might have fatally made for slavish imitation. Inness was able to translate his exposure to the Barbizon style into his own artistic terms over the course of years. Slowly, incrementally—change with Inness was rarely sudden or straightforward—Inness jettisoned his old-master painters mannerisms for the warm colors and informal naturalism that marked the Barbizon. What he admired in their work, and always strove for in his own, was unity of effect and overall harmony. "As landscape painters I consider Rousseau, Daubigny, and Corot among the very best. Daubigny particularly and Corot have mastered the relation of things in nature one to another, and have obtained the greatest works, representations more or less nearly perfect." According to Inness's son, George Jr., the artist, like his colleague La Farge, was drawn to the spontaneity and freedom of the men of 1830, especially as they embodied the purity of an idea. "There was no affectation in these men, there was no tricks of color. But the trouble with Rousseau was that he has too much detail. He's little, he's twopenny. He's little with detail, and that takes away from his artistic worth." George Inness Jr., who also wrote a biography of his father, noted that Inness was not partial to Corot, admiring him as a "poet and tonist," but finding him weak in his key of color. "The man, I believe, who had the greatest influence on him [Inness] was the English artist Constable, about whom he was very enthusiastic.

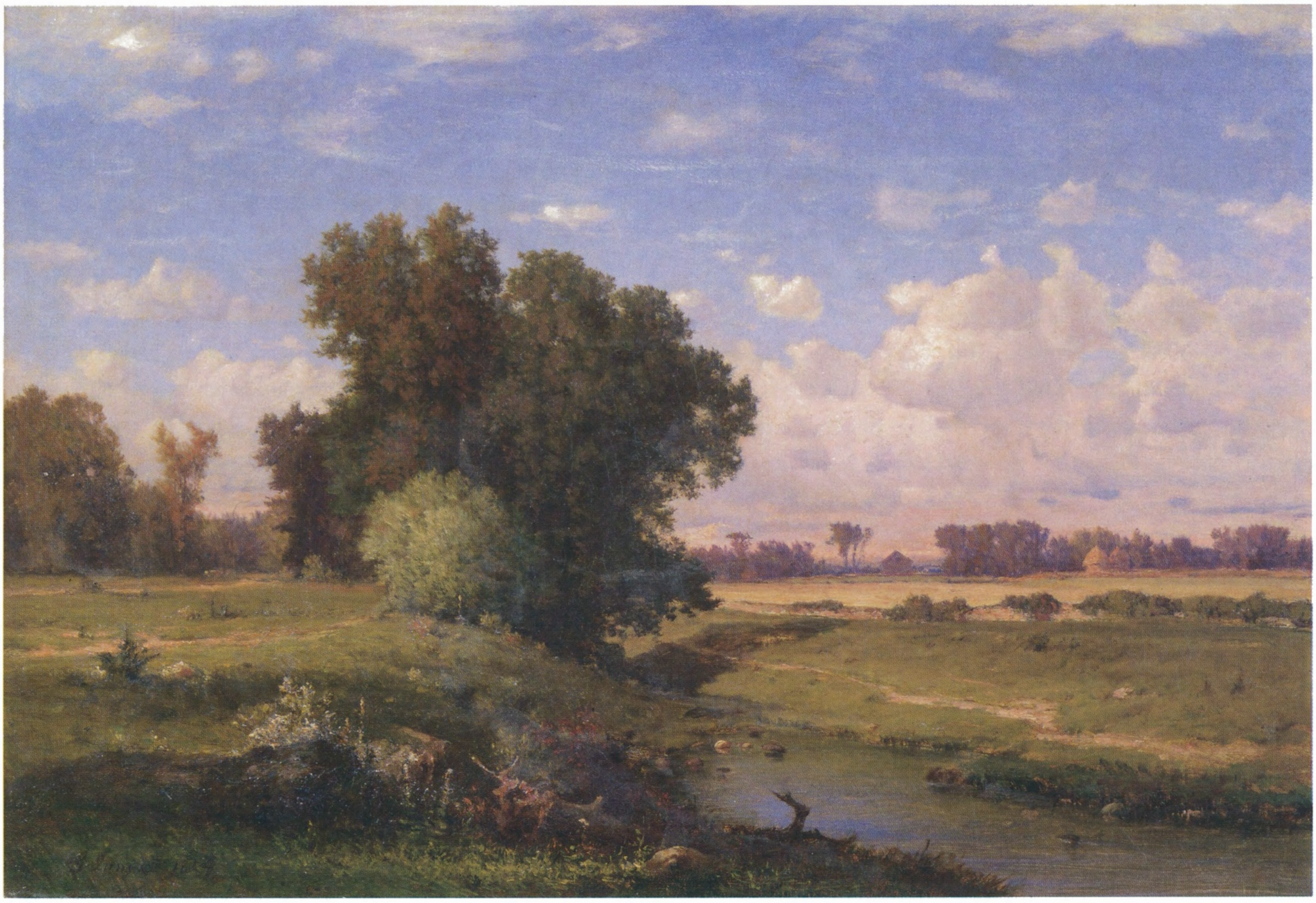


Fig. 2.8. George Inness, *Hackensack Meadows, Sunset*, 1859. Oil on canvas, 18¼ x 26 in. Collection of The New-York Historical Society.

I believe more of Constable shows in Inness's works than any of the French school."[24]

Hackensack Meadows, Sunset, 1859 (fig. 2.8), is perhaps the first of Inness's paintings to demonstrate the artist's complete absorption of the Barbizon mode of broad naturalistic color and luxuriant tone, turned to his own inimitable style. This artfully constructed scene, set just across the Hudson River from Inness's studio in New York, comprises a unity of vision free from the artificiality of Inness's earlier works. In essence, *Hackensack Meadows, Sunset,* has many of the features of a classic Tonalist landscape of the 1880s: the diagonal thrust of the stream and the muddy paths lead the eye into the middle ground and a scene rendered in lush modulated green tones; the various landscape elements—flowers, grasses, trees, stones—gain a presence in the imagination by virtue of soft tonal light and the way these motifs, some in detail, some in luxuriant generalized forms, seem to float forward to the canvas plane, and so enchant the eye. Although the view is expansive, the scene has the contemplative ambience of a more circumscribed setting. Compared to, for example, a work by Kensett, Church, or Jasper Cropsey—another Hudson River School artist—of the same period, *Hackensack Meadows, Sunset* is positively unusual in its lack of formulaic visual stepping stones leading the eye into and around the composition, or toward the distant horizon; the result is an exquisite indwelling feel for nature—up front and very personal as fore- and middle grounds hover more than recede into space. It is less a window into nature and more an imaginative advance of nature into the consciousness of the observer. Even under such broad and blue skies, the place shimmers with a soulful intimacy that only La Farge in Newport and Glen Cove—on a much-reduced scale—approximated at the time. The Inness scholar Michael Quick has noted the elements of Ruskinian naturalism in Inness's work of the late 1850s, a naturalism found in the artist's American contemporaries like the Hudson River School painter William Trost Richards, and a style that, by balancing detailed observations against the artist's more broadly rendered passages of hazy color and form, would also appeal to more traditional tastes.[25] But as Frank Jewett Mather Jr. noted, a painting like *Hackensack Meadows, Sunset* represents a huge step forward in skill and compositional unity. "Already we have wonderful edges that characterize almost unaided the masses therein contained, and we have instead of copies of weeds and twigs fine manipulations of paint that suggest such features without impairing the general effect."[26]

The painting is also extraordinary for its downplaying of human or animal life. There is a glimpse of a house on the horizon, perhaps a tiny cow in the distance, only the merest signs of an active human presence. The pastoral emptiness bereft of human or animal anecdote is rare for the era, and even rarer for Inness who was putting figures—often human observers, cows, sheep, and domestic fowl—in his paintings right up to the end of his life. None of his first-generation Tonalist contemporaries, Hunt, La Farge, Wyant or Martin—Whistler never—retained as many anecdotal tropes of classic Barbizon style. Inness had some difficulty weaning himself from Barbizon staffage; he complained bitterly to his son that dealers and patrons clamored for him to include just such narrative subject matter. "Never paint with the idea of selling. Lose everything first, George. You can put in a little dog, maybe, and it will buy you an overcoat. . . . Gad! the struggles I have had in my life to be true! Dealers come in and offer me money to put in this or that, and I have to do it because I have to live."[27]

Inness in Medfield and Boston: The Development of a Tonalist Style

Almost every time Inness changed the surroundings in which he painted, new insights and inspiration resulted. His move from Brooklyn in 1860 to the small town of Medfield, southwest of Boston (only a few miles from the town of Milton, Massachusetts, where Hunt would relocate in 1862), provided Inness with fresh subjects and an injection of raw emotional energy, resulting in a more painterly and expressive style. In addition, Medfield, a short train ride away from Boston, offered him a sophisticated and appreciative climate for his art, and an art scene Hunt had been busy educating since his return from France in 1855. As Inness's son noted: "For several years he struggled for recognition, but New York still held to the old school and would have none of him; so we moved to Boston, where, again through the help of Ogden Haggerty, Williams & Everett, prominent picture-dealers, took over the management of his pictures."[28] Nearby Boston gave him the infrastructure of sympathetic collectors, dealers, and critics—sophisticated and well disposed to the "French style" in art. He undoubtedly saw the work of Hunt and La Farge in the Boston galleries. Inness was also a committed abolitionist—aided by his friend Henry Ward Beecher—as was Hunt, and with the onslaught of the Civil War after 1861, Medfield and Boston placed Inness in close proximity to a hotbed of abolitionist thinking

It is uncanny that during the Civil War era of the early 1860s, Inness, as well as Hunt and La Farge, produced some of the first great prototypical examples of the Tonalist domestic landscape—what Inness would later come to call the "civilized landscape." Clearly, the three artists must have been aware of one another's innovations through Boston dealing and collecting circles, but something of the ongoing trauma of the Civil War undoubtedly played a part, too, in turning their attention to the domestic landscape for subject matter. In the artists' hearts and minds, the rising toll of battle must have elicited profound sorrow in face of the mounting losses, prompting instincts to embrace what was most precious, most dear to the imagination, or on a more ideological level, what the fight was all about. The love of precious home ground clearly filled many hearts in these anxiety-ridden years. La Farge's innovative experiments in landscape might have been more aloof and ethereal, Hunt's more personal and circumscribed, but the two painters shared with Inness a profound need to render scenes of home and associated domestic and spiritual values.

Of these three artists, Inness was the most high-strung and passionately attuned to the emotional shocks of the carnage (Inness tried to enlist in the Union Army and raised cash for the cause), and responded with the most overtly allegorical and narrative works of his career. The Boston writer James Jackson Jarves, writing of such a painting in 1863, noted how Inness employed landscape to communicate ideas, how he used nature's forms as a language to express thoughts, revealing "the aspirations and sentiments of the artist. It is a visible confession of his theory, faith, and aims. Outwardly, a beautiful composition of mingled stream, meadow, field, hillside and forest, with its rich associations of harvest and human labor, overcast by storm, through which gleams the rainbow of hope; inwardly an eloquent symbol of a struggling soul."[29] Although such emphatic allegorical themes played a passing and minor role in Inness's art, something of the emotional tenor of this kind of bucolic landscape imagery retained a hold on the collective imagination in the post–Civil War decades. The lingering trauma of the conflict and the subsequent social and spiritual upheavals made a retreat to images of the mythic heartland congenial to artists and buyers alike. And so with Inness, as it had for Hunt and La Farge, the New England pastoral, the farms and coppices, the abandoned roads and woodlots, which had formed the backdrop to a distinctive way of life, became the chosen subject matter of the Tonalist landscape in the decades to come. These were the visual metaphors, the home truths for which the Union soldiers fought. This revered agrarian world of the forefathers—much of it abandoned by the 1880s for better lands in the West—would become the central focus of the Tonalist movement, the vision that as both metaphor and idea did much to inoculate the New England mind against the patriotic extravaganza of the Hudson River painters and the pastoral clichés of peasant life represented by the French Barbizon tradition. In post–Civil War America, both traumatized and energized by conflict, images of the ancestral home, the spirit of home ground, provided a healing solace—an image poetic, often melancholy, veiled in high sentiment and nostalgia—that struck the chords of mystic memory that rang most true for a democratic nation.

Inness's stay in Medfield between 1860 and 1863, along with fresh subject matter and the fraught emotional climate of the Civil War years, engendered a new expressive painterly quality in his work. As historian Michael Quick has written, "[T]he Medfield style is a consciousness of brushwork based upon the

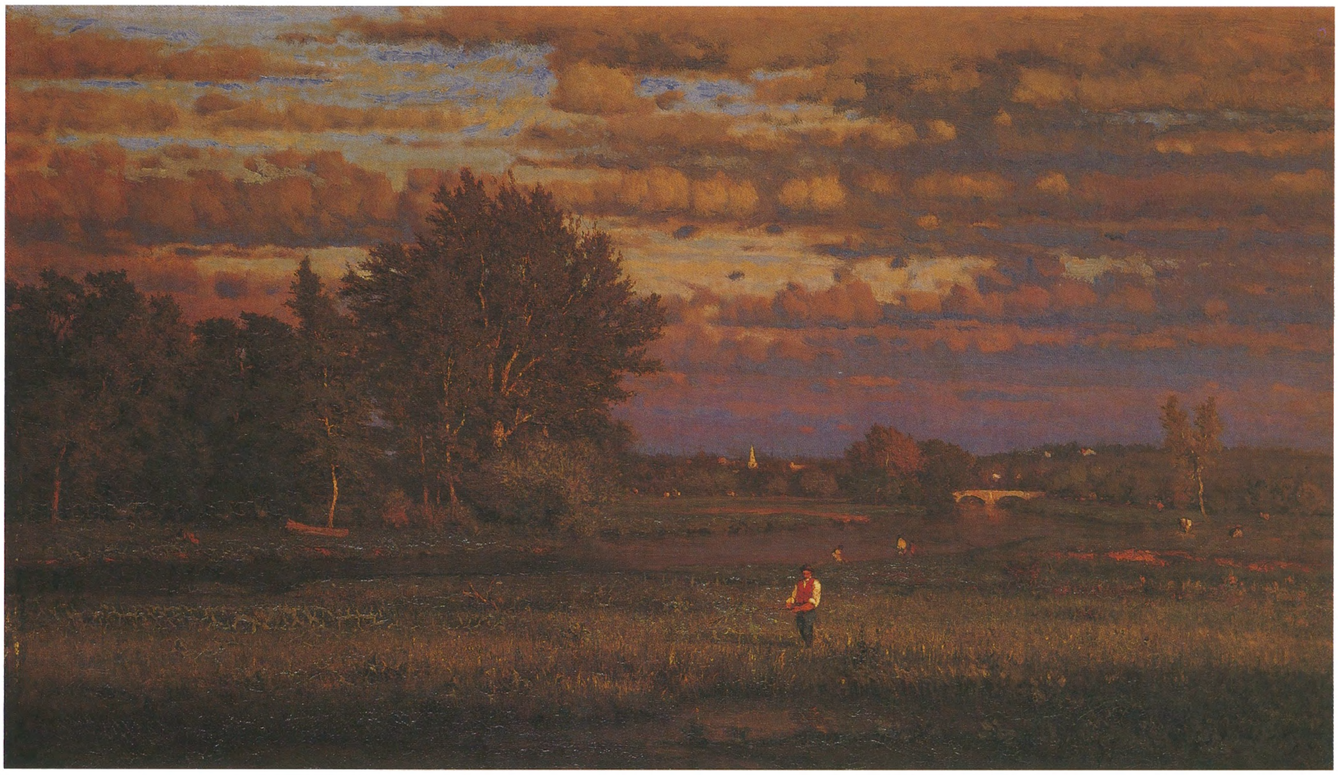


Fig. 2.9. George Inness, *Clearing Up*, 1860. Oil on canvas, 15¼ x 25⅜ in. George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, Springfield, MA.

practice of direct painting—the blending of color into color, wet into wet, on the canvas, in decisive, clever brushstrokes—in a manner that became appealing to general taste in New York only after 1878."[30] *Clearing Up*, 1860 (fig. 2.9), painted with lush bravura in Medfield in 1860 on the eve of war, captures precisely the essence of rural America that would find its way into thousands of Tonalist canvases by the 1880s. Such scenes became the template of the domestic landscape for which Inness and his followers would become renowned. In this sumptuous, broadly conceived landscape, the artist integrates the Barbizon innovations of color and expressive massing of form, transforming them into a singular emotional articulation that would be the essence of Inness's signature style, though much modified, for the next thirty years. In the broadness of the composition, the openness of space, and the scintillating light which energizes both the luxurious greens of the meadow and the horizontal patterning of clouds, *Clearing Up* taps into similar themes of sentiment as the Luminist Martin Johnson Heade's haystack paintings of the Newbury marshes of the 1860s, although Inness's painterly handling is very different from that of the more meticulous Heade. What begins to become increasingly apparent in the Medfield years from 1860 to 1863, and in the decade to follow, is the personality of the artist and the projection in paint of his inner struggles, artistic and religious. The Medfield pictures were well received in Boston, although they occasioned consternation and dismissal in New York. It is this expressive quality and deep suggestiveness—and later subtle modulations of tone—that sets Inness apart from his Hudson River contemporaries and constitutes his fundamental contribution to the Tonalist movement. In a Boston review of 1862, Inness's "great sprawling marks of the brush every which way all over the canvas," and his, "great coils and lumps of paint,"[31] were contrasted with the smooth finish and polished truth to nature of the Hudson River School; in Boston eyes there was no comparison.

As early as 1863, in a pamphlet probably written by Inness and including the thoughts of the sympathetic Boston critic James Jackson Jarves, the artist is portrayed as going head to head with the Hudson River School and its penchant for the local and particular. "Mr. Inness on the contrary, has long held the opinion that only the elements of the truly picturesque exist externally in any local sense... and that the highest beauty and truest value of the landscape painting are in the sentiment and feeling which flow from the mind and heart of the artist."[32] Jarves wrote of Inness's fundamentally intuitive approach to his art, "It develops the fact from the idea, giving the preference to the subjective thought over the objective form of its fundamental motive.... His pictures illustrate phases of mind and feelings. He uses nature's forms simply as language to express thoughts."[33] The expressive quality of the Medfield period, when Inness was first drawn to depict the poetic moods of dusk and dawn, was probably influenced by the charismatic personality and writings of Henry Ward Beecher, who encouraged his readers to explore the mind of nature through their feelings—to see through the soul. Beecher, in turn, was simply restating in more overtly religious terms what Emerson had written in his essay *Nature*, "the poet conforms things to his thoughts."

It was during the artist's difficult wandering years of the 1860s, before Inness finally won over the New York critics in the late 1870s, that his image as a romantic rebel—an American "ingenuity"—began to take shape in the press and public mind. "Mr. Inness realizes perhaps more than any of our painters the popular idea of an artist. His slight form, his marked features, his sensitive mouth, his high cheek-bones, and sharp-cut prominent brow, which encases dark brown eyes, now restless, and now fixed, . . . his long black hair, always in disorder, his ardent temperament and sensitive nature, his ignorance of the 'savoir-faire' of life—all go to make up the artist."[34]

The emerging media image was no mere cant: Inness struggled with depression most of his life and attempted suicide probably more than once. He seems to have been prone to furious mood swings that were at least partly the result of the highs and lows of his unresolved creative drives and tormenting self-doubt. In later years, his son recalled his father's fanatic artistic drive. "When he painted he put all the force of his nature into it. Full of vim and vigor, he was like a dynamo. It was punch here and dab there. He was indefatigable. He was a totally different man in his studio from what he was out of doors. Out of doors he was quiet, rational, and absorbed. I have seen him sit in the same spot every day for a week or more studying carefully and minutely the contours of trees and the composition of the clouds and grass, drawing very carefully with painstaking exactness. But in his studio he was like a madman. He seldom painted direct from nature. He would study for days, then with a sudden inspiration would go at a canvas with the most dynamic energy, creating the composition from his own brain, but with so thorough an underlying knowledge of nature that the key-note of his landscapes was always truth and sincerity and absolute fidelity to nature. It was his honesty and simplicity that made him great."[35]

Like Hunt during the 1860s and 1870s, the constant battle for recognition by the critics took its toll. Not until the early 1880s did Inness enjoy anything close to financial security.

Inness in Eagleswood and the Search for Quality of Tone

In 1863, Inness relocated to an estate known as Eagleswood in New Jersey, which had a history as a utopian religious community. There he came again under the influence of William Page, an artist whom he had first known in Rome in the early 1850s. Page not only directed Inness toward the Swedenborgian faith—Inness was baptized into the church in 1868—but encouraged the development in Inness of a harmonious and soft-edged tonal style that reflected or projected aspects of the Swedenborgian belief that material objects, their forms and colors, have a spiritual significance and correspondence in a higher realm—the "unseen" in nature that Inness often referred to in his writings. The exuberance of the Medfield period is replaced by a quieter and softer paint handling, more rounded and sculptural. *Medfield Landscape* (also known as *Clearing*), 1865 (fig. 2.10), displays the new directions of the Eagleswood style; in Michael Quick's description, the work "is indirectly painted with little evident brushwork and in a sonorous but restrained manner. Its simplified forms have a greater plastic quality. . . . The Eagleswood image is more monumental, containing potential, rather than expressed energy."[36] Page encouraged Inness to employ a "middle tint," around which the composition gains equilibrium, both emotional and formal. According to Quick, Page introduced some tension through the dynamic struggle between layers of different colors. By glazing a color over a markedly different, often complementary one, Page obtained the lifelike process of one color asserting itself through the color layer on top and the color on top, in turn, suppressing the color beneath."[37] Inness's Eagleswood paintings display a new colorist subtlety and harmony, another stylistic trait and resource that Inness carried with him and deployed more fully in later years. By 1863, and certainly by 1868, Inness already was in command of much of the technical know-how that would ultimately fuel his masterful synthetic style of the 1880s.

Inness's preoccupation with "the middle tone," which by the late 1870s was becoming the distinctive element in his work, and that of the Tonalist movement, became the subject of much retrospective attention after his death. In his reminiscences about his father, George Inness Jr. reprised the discussions of Inness and William Page from the 1860s, when innovations in tonality were first bandied about. "Now the middle tone was Page's idea. He claimed that the horizon should be a middle tone; that is, it should be half-way between the lightest light and greatest dark in the picture. Father agreed with him on that point, but what they could not agree upon was just what a middle tone really was. So Page, to explain more fully, took a strip of tin and painted it white at one end and black at the other, and then graded in stripes from both ends until it reached a gray tone in the middle. This he showed to my father and said triumphantly, 'There's the true middle tone!' The next day my father went to Page's studio with a similar strip of tin and declared that he had the true middle tone. When they compared the two hues, there was no resemblance between them. Then the fight was on, and these two gentlemen, after yelling themselves hoarse and saying some very uncomplimentary things to each other, would break away, and not speak to each other for days. Then they would come together again and resume the argument with renewed vigor."[38]

Inness biographer Elliott Daingerfield related how Inness preferred to regard his beloved middle tone in terms of a musical analogy, in which the most perfect and pure tone would occur at the midpoint of a ringing note's cascade across

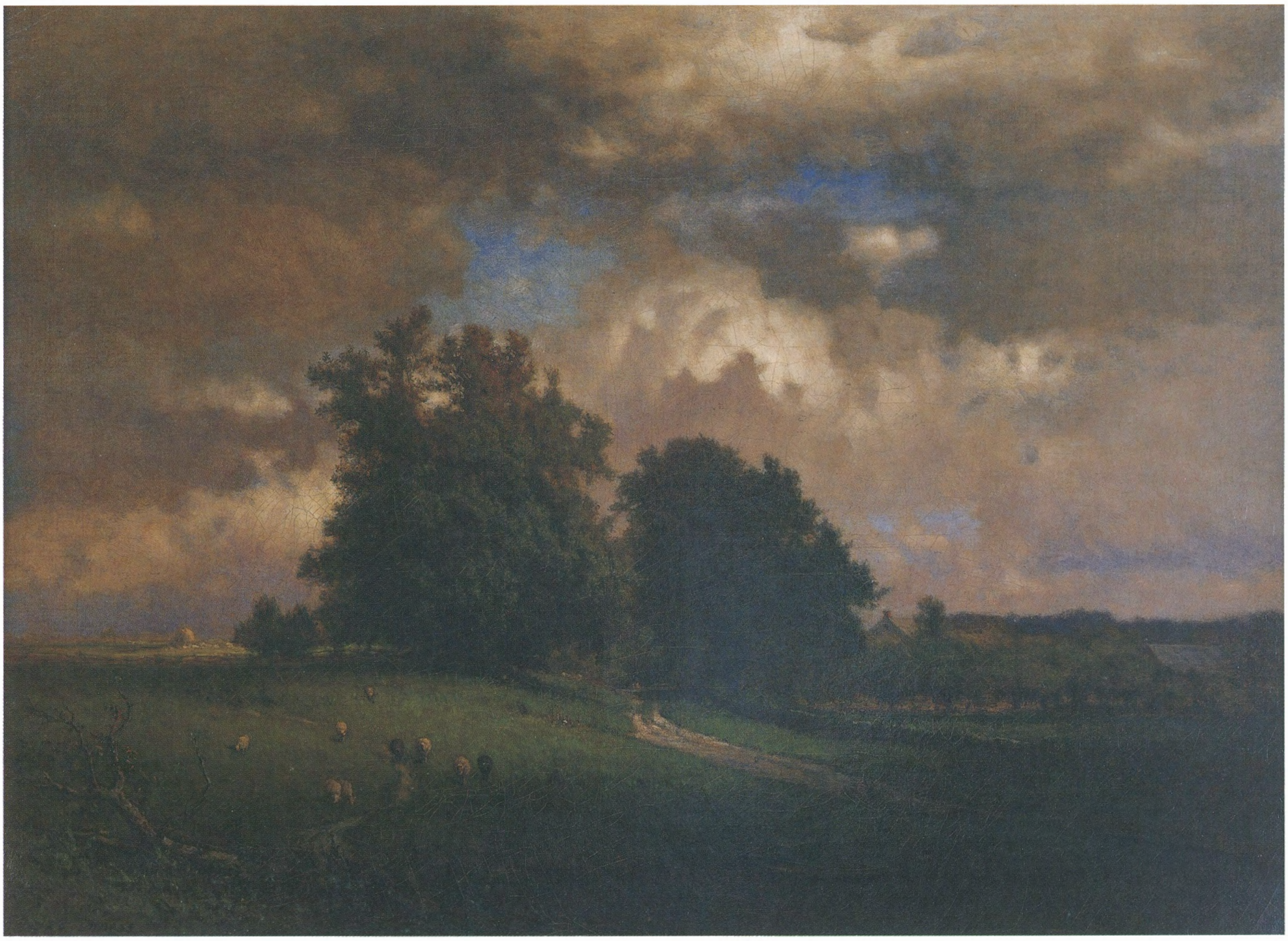


Fig. 2.10. George Inness, *Medfield Landscape* (also known as *Clearing*), c. 1863–65. Oil on canvas, 22 x 30 in. Pomona College Collection. Bequest of Clyde Alan Matson.

an octave. Daingerfield also related that Inness often visualized his tonal strategies in terms of a vortex of hues. Possibly Inness's Swedenborgian metaphysics made the equilibrium of the middle tone a congenial means to spiritual ends. Whatever the case, Inness in practice proceeded by intuition and craft to get the right tonal balance in his best paintings; he was his own toughest critic, destroying and painting over many a canvas in his ruthless quest for perfection. As Samuel Isham noted in his *History of American Painting* of 1905, Inness struggled in the 1870s to get this tonal equilibrium—and not always successfully. "In his middle period, frequently a light spot, a group of cattle, a sail on a river, is out of value, strikes the eye with too great insistence. His late work holds together flawlessly."[39]

Inness: The Middle Years, 1867–78

The middle years of Inness's career, from the time the artist left Eagleswood in 1867 until he finally settled in Montclair, New Jersey, in 1878, where he retained a home and studio until the end of his life, were peripatetic years of travel and constant evolution and adaptation to new circumstances and market realities. In the late 1860s the influence of William Page's tonal theories remained a telling presence in Inness's scenes of the Catskills, in which he painted thin washes of color over color to obtain a lush tonal balance. Later in Italy and France, his experiments with sumptuous color-laden tonalities continued to yield pictures of rare beauty, and again in 1875, upon his return to Medfield, his enthusiasm for expressive and rich tonality produced some of the early masterworks of his emerging synthetic style, especially his painting of New Hampshire. Market realities always weighed in the balance with his creative drives. Many of Inness's Italian scenes were produced on demand for the artist's Boston dealers. Populated with peasants and depicting well-known tourist haunts, they were the "potboilers" that infuriated Inness to have to paint as concessions to economic necessity. Even his more successful landscapes of the early 1870s exhibit a broad picturesque quality with bows to public taste in terms of the inclusion of anecdotal animal and human figures, whether used simply to add interest, as Inness often put it, or notes of color or focal points to give contrast or break up an overly monotonous tonal harmony. If Inness had a weakness it was what Mather described as immoderation, a lack of patience, and a tendency to improvise rather than reflect. The lack of a standard model for Inness also perplexed critics and collectors. But immoderation or inconsistency was also his strength, it allowed Inness the latitude to engineer breakthroughs. The exceptional works, the most deeply expressive and progressive in terms of formal concerns, set the benchmarks for the next, even more radical step.

As early as 1873, a Boston writer in *Appletons' Journal* noted a change in Inness's most recent work. "Since he went to Rome . . . he has at times varied [his] brown under-tint with a neutral gray, an entirely negative basis, from which he can equally work in colder or warmer, darker or lighter hues."[40] It may be that Inness was moving away from the Barbizon preference for a brown ground and adopting a more neutral or warmer, "negative," undertone, over which cooler overtones could be applied to gain the feeling of atmospheric vibration: the critical innovation of the Tonalists as described by Birge Harrison in his book on landscape painting in 1909. According to Samuel Isham in *History of American Painting*, "[Inness's] method of painting was to cover the whole canvas with a thin glaze of Indian red, to touch in the main masses of shadow in black, and then to work on this foundation, gradually bringing the whole picture forward by constant working over."[41] Inness's Tonalist palette was evolving from his days with Page at Eagleswood, enriched with Italian color, and further influenced by the experience of European weather, especially the six months or so he spent in France beginning in June 1874 painting at Etretat in Normandy. The soft atmospheric microclimate of the coastal areas of Normandy and Brittany, with its pearly gray skies, often overcast and moisture laden, provided perfect conditions for the tonal painter. Inness was only one of many expatriate American painters (Whistler, too, was drawn to cloudy days along the French coast) to find himself enamored of such weather conditions, subsequently incorporating the soft-edged grays of Brittany and Normandy into his American work. An expatriate American artist, Frederick Arthur Bridgman (see chapter 3, figs. 3.38–3.40), was creating extraordinary Tonalist landscapes full of glowing natural light in Brittany and Paris in the early 1870s, which Inness may well have seen. Whatever the precise chemistry of influence and interaction, Inness's paintings after 1875, when he returned to Medfield from France, began to display a sumptuous consistency of tone, or a tonal equilibrium based on a "middle tone," described by Inness as the "half-dark or half-light of the picture," most clearly manifest at the horizon line of the landscape. The soft melting grays and vaporous blurred light along the horizon edges in Inness's landscapes of around 1875 provided a reference point for the harmonization of tones throughout, and ultimately the unity of the whole. Or, as Samuel Isham observed, "As a reasoner and theorizer on his art he had many maxims for his work, the most important being that the sky should be given as a half-tone against which both the lights and darks of the picture should contrast."[42]

Even as the tough depression of the years 1873 to 1878 took its toll on the nation's—and Boston's—economy, Inness was welcomed back into Boston art circles in 1875. The Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association had awarded him a gold medal at its 1874 exhibition and two years later he was elected an officer of the Boston Art Club. Back in New England, Inness was eager to rejuvenate his reputation by concentrating on American scenes. His return to his old stomping grounds in Medfield seemed to imbue his art with a renewed intensity of feeling that again set him on the path to innovation and, if anything, an even more heightened awareness of atmosphere. His *Evening at Medfield* (1875, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) retains the bold and dark foreground masses Inness had perfected in his French subjects of the previous year, but here joined with a brooding melancholy that captivated contemporary critics.

Inspired by his return to his homeland, and positive critical responses from the Boston art world—though few sales—1875 proved a prolific and creative year for Inness. On a trip to North Conway, New Hampshire, in the spring of 1875, Inness found evocative scenery that prompted the development in his work of a supercharged expression of local color, and an almost otherworldly tonality enriched and heightened by an all-encompassing atmosphere. In *Keersage Village*, 1875 (fig. 2.11), the horizon is raised, the natural forms in the fore- and middle grounds are pushed forward to the picture plane, and the caldron of a gray sky fairly tumbles out of the canvas plane. Inness's overall tonality produces a scene that is less about place and more about the poetry of time and the emotional effects of threatening weather. A new richness and decorative quality becomes apparent in his work, "tenderer in feeling" than his Italian subjects, according to one reviewer. But it was the evocation of memory that prompted the most heartfelt praise from one Boston reviewer for Inness's New Hampshire scenes. "We have here the White Mountains as we bring them away in our minds, and as we love to dwell upon them in our memories. The realistic element draws you into the scenes, and the spiritualistic, which, after all is the absolutely realistic, lifts you above them into the highest realms of thought."[43] Ten years after the end of the Civil War, memory—the deep retrospective gaze, was a rising force in the American imagination.

During this fecund period, Inness seemed drawn to scenes that allowed him a relatively spacious horizon line, which in turn provided him with his middle tone (halfway between the lightest light and greatest dark in the picture). The majority of his pictures of these years incorporate a distant view; often the scenes are constructed around a high vantage point. This favored pictorial construct compelled him to use other compositional strategies to produce the feeling of enclosure—reflecting the emotional climate of the times—that began to characterize his works from the late 1870s on, and which subsequently impelled him toward the classic form of the more intimate Tonalist landscape as it evolved into the 1880s. Inness began raising

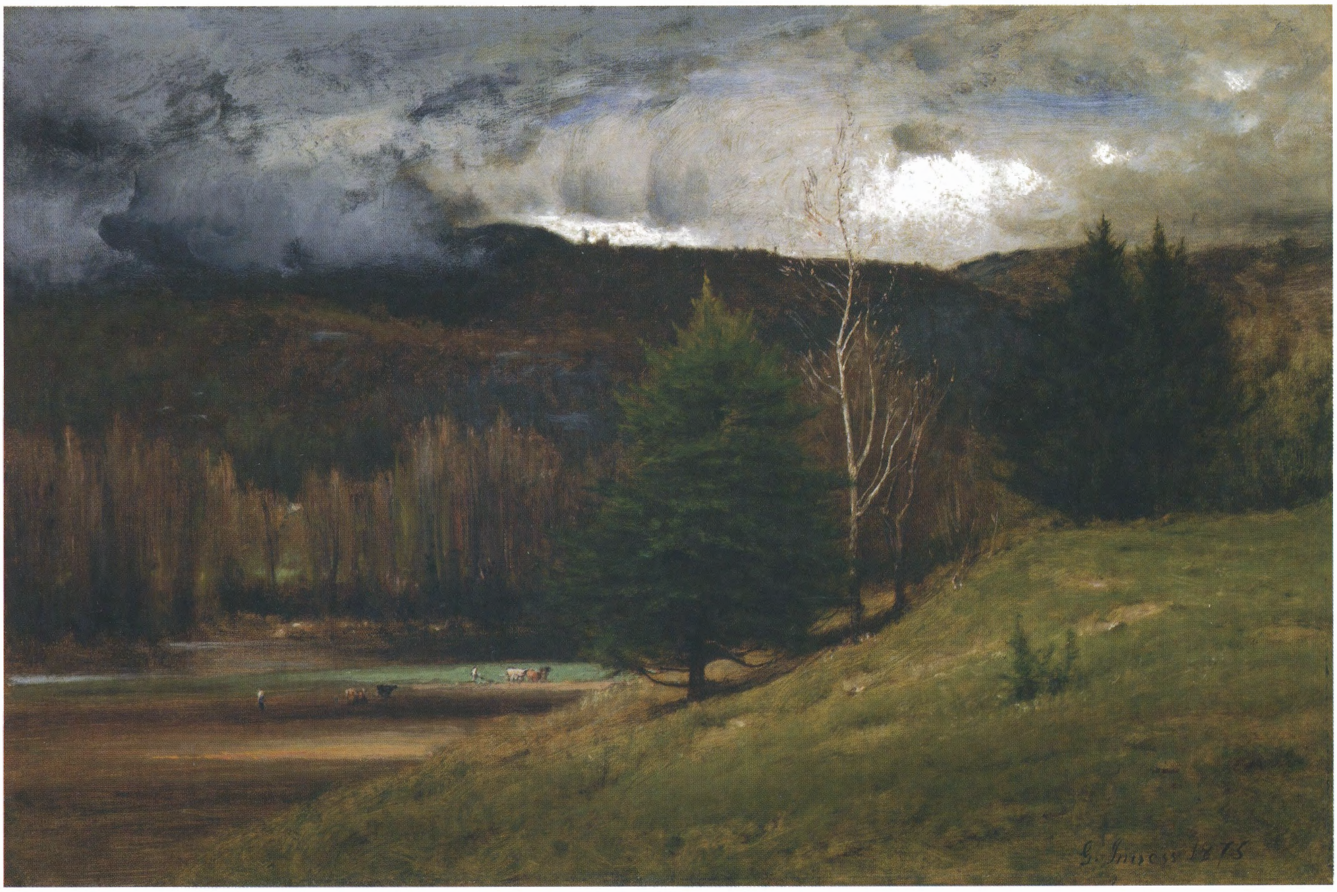


Fig. 2.11. George Inness, *Kearsarge Village*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 16⅛ x 24 in. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Miss Mary Thacher in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Henry C. Thacher and Miss Martha Thacher, 30.102.

his horizon line, thickening his skies with brooding clouds, and filling the fore- and middle ground with trees and hilly rises, scattering in the occasional telling detail, thus creating a scrim of activated paint that absorbed the viewer's immediate attention. *Passing Clouds*, 1876 (fig. 2.12), conveys Inness's strategy of using a middle gray tone along the horizon and allowing variations on this gray tonality to permeate and unify his composition. A foreground figure, a richly golden copse of trees in the middle ground, and sumptuous roiling clouds overhead lend immediacy and intimacy—and a sense of serene beauty—to what otherwise could have been a rather prosaic landscape. The blue-gray of the churning sky presses into the viewer's space and bathes the rest of the canvas in a halation of soft bluish tonality, almost palpable to the eye.

Inness's second Medfield period, especially the paintings of New Hampshire, solidified and expanded the gains made by the artist in the previous fifteen years. He had absorbed the lessons of Europe and come into his own, just as Hunt was achieving similar things in his late landscapes after the disastrous Boston fire of 1872, which had destroyed his studio but liberated him from European influences. There is a remarkable confluence—perhaps a synergy of effects—between Inness's evolving style of the mid-1870s and works by both Hunt and La Farge in the same period. It is entirely possible that Inness caught wind of Hunt's late landscapes in 1875–76, or vice versa, and absorbed something of their energy and bravura paint manipulation, broadly rendered forms, and serene tonality. This uncanny convergence of Tonalist styles by these three pathfinders of Tonalism, as had been the case ten years before in 1860–63, occurred before the majority of foreign-trained Americans arrived back in New York around 1878; Inness, Hunt, and La Farge set the stage for the revolution to come.

By 1876, Inness was painting more and more intimate scenes, places bathed in the soft half-light of dawn and dusk, landscapes as much of the mind as the eye. Sadly, given how well he was painting, bad economic times and a finicky market—even in Boston—caused him to suddenly flee Medfield in March of 1876 and return to New York. It was an ignominious departure for a great artist. He left with an Italian landscape that belonged to his Boston dealer Doll & Richards, which he subsequently exhibited in New York, and was then sued by his dealer for the return of this property. Unpleasant though the circumstances of his relocation to New York might have been, his timing could not have been better. Within a matter of years, the art world of New York would be revolutionized by the many artists returning from Europe, precipitating the shift in the most advanced viewpoints from Boston to New York. As it turned out, Inness's return to New York was a harbinger of that change.

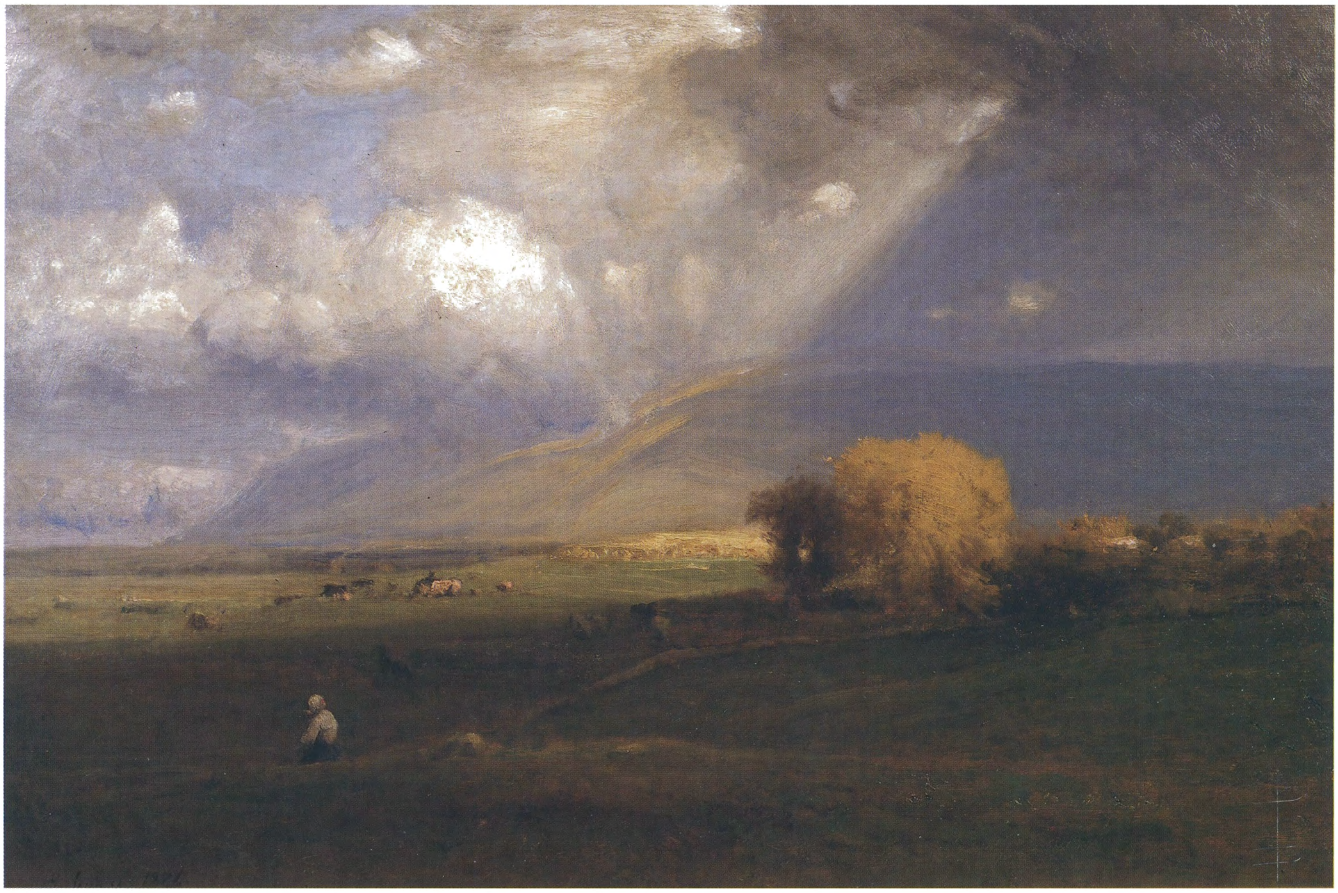


Fig. 2.12. George Inness, *Passing Clouds*, 1876. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

Inness and Henry Ward Beecher: A New Spirituality in Art

Inness's development of a more intimate, expressive, and emotion-charged landscape style in the later part of the 1870s—confounding the New York critics with his formal and spellbinding tonal innovations—probably had as much to do with his long-simmering philosophic and religious propensities in these years and later, as with his technical innovations. For Inness, technique was only a handmaiden to the power of spirit in nature that he sought to communicate. Feeling was the ultimate goal of his art. Although Inness—along with Hunt and La Farge—was an avatar of artistic innovation as he plunged back into the New York art scene in early 1876, he was hardly divorced from changes in the public mood and perception of art, and was in part riding a wave of more indwelling spirituality and openness to deep emotion that characterized the decades after the Civil War. If Boston had been the mecca of sophisticated aesthetic ideas in the 1860s and 1870s, New York by the late 1870s was fast surpassing Boston in progressive attitudes—and just about everything else. Within years, New York would become not just the center of the American art world, but the nexus of commerce, industry, publishing and communications, and thus the epicenter of the latest religious and aesthetic movements promoted and disseminated in newspapers, magazines (most art journals were located in New York), and book publishing. The scintillating New England mind fired by Emerson and Thoreau was merged into New York's diverse cultural life, where it was again transformed in a media blitz that permeated the country. New York's information culture was enjoying its first golden age. In the religious sphere, a similar process had been going on for decades. Through celebrity preachers like Henry Ward Beecher, New York—Brooklyn was the epicenter of Beecher's message of spiritual uplift—had absorbed much of the fading Puritan moral imperative that had once stirred New England, softening its hard edges and implacable arguments for sin and predestination, and finally translating it into more welcoming forms: a kinder, gentler religious uplift that began filling newspapers and magazines before the war and reached a crescendo in the decades thereafter.

As Inness was the progenitor of a new sensibility in art, so Henry Ward Beecher was the tastemaker of mid-century religion. Much of this revolution in religious sensibility seamlessly flowed into the aesthetic arena, sparked by Beecher, who was an early friend and patron of Inness. Beecher, who preached at Brooklyn's famous Congregational Plymouth Church—the mega-church of its day—promoted a refreshing blend of enlivened spirituality and artistic sensitivity, energized by the passions of the abolitionist movement and a rejuvenated spirit of grace. Beecher's blend of heartfelt emotion replaced the ossified Calvinism of the older generation. This sea change in popular religious attitudes, first visible in Boston and Concord in the antebellum years, provided an expanding circle of congenial admirers for Inness, especially after the full disaster of the Civil War began to sink in.

Henry Ward Beecher not only owned eight landscapes by Inness, he proposed titles for many of the artist's paintings. It was Beecher who first dismissed Inness's Hudson River School competitors as purveyors of "the anatomical landscape," and their works as those of a "useful copyist." Beecher preached and lectured to the effect that great art must get beyond purely physical renditions and tap into a deeper vein, which elicited the "hearts & imagination" of the viewer. It was Inness's ability to portray such sentiments, according to Beecher, that "makes Geo. Inness the first of American landscape painters. . . . His real pictures are steeped & saturated with feeling. His heart is as fitful as an Eolian harp, but every wind swells it with wild music. His pictures are almost a journal & confession. This one is ragged, craggy & fierce in its hateful clouds, its sky is chilly, its rocks & trees are weird and ugly. You would think that a crew of devils damned had just danced there & nothing had been cleared up after them."[44] This was the kind of ecstatic prose that galvanized Inness's early Medfield paintings of 1860–63.

Beecher and the circle of authors and journalists in his orbit wrote on religion, aesthetics, politics, and social reform. In effect, certainly in the 1850s, Beecher proved to be a bastion of Boston enlightenment for benighted New York, especially on abolitionist issues before the war. Beecher in great part mirrored Emerson on a range of subjects and was hugely influential in molding public taste, smoothing the way for Inness in the early going, and later for his ultimate embrace in New York and the rest of the country, until by 1900 Inness was considered America's greatest artist. Beecher was from an old Connecticut family of strong Calvinist persuasion; he was born in Litchfield, and then spent much of his youth in Boston where his father, Lyman Beecher, preached a strict Calvinist creed. Later, Henry Ward Beecher studied at Amherst and spent formative years preaching on the western frontier in Ohio and Indiana. By the time Beecher and Inness's paths crossed in New York in the 1850s, Beecher was running the Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, perhaps the wealthiest and most passionately involved church of its day on burning social issues. In his popular writings for newspapers, the bookish Beecher—who often looked and acted like the great aesthete of the day, Oscar Wilde—promoted intellectual and cultural development to his far-flung flock. He wrote intelligently and insightfully about art, advocating exposure to art and nature as a means of lifting the spirit. A human dynamo of optimism, he was a proselytizer for what amounted to a self-help program of aesthetic enlightenment and upward mobility. Art was a path—in today's terms, a form of therapy—to spiritual growth and deeper insights into the self. Women literally swooned at his sermons and sexual scandals would darken his late career. Among many things, Beecher was a passionate advocate of women's rights.

His generation, which included Inness, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, had been molded as young men in the 1830s by the Romantic movement, both by the German idealist philosophers and the English nature poets. A recent biography of Beecher observes: "For the earnest young men of the 1830s, these Romantic writers represented a rebellion against the tyranny of tradition and a soul-deadening culture obsessed with money, propriety, and material comfort. They emphasized imagination over reason, spontaneity over formality, spirituality over religion, self-expression over social convention, nature over society, and individual conscience over the rule of law. Their manifesto was summed up by the English poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge: 'Deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling.'"[45] By the 1850s and 1860s, men like Beecher, Emerson, Thoreau, and Inness had thoroughly absorbed prevailing European literary and philosophical influences (as their artist contemporaries absorbed new aesthetic ideas in Paris and Munich in the 1860s and 1870s), transforming these foreign ideas into peculiarly American forms, in Beecher's case, a religion of unconditional love, deep sentiment, and such very American attitudes as, "incurable optimism; can-do enthusiasm; and open-minded, open-hearted pragmatism."[46] Emerson had been an early exemplar of the Transcendentalist spiritual pilgrimage when he rejected the Congregationalist Church to became a popular philosopher and exponent of American self-reliance based on the power of a passionate and innate idealism; Thoreau was another exemplar; a born pagan, who praised the poetry of nature as subject and source of epiphanies of the spirit. Inness, a religious seeker to his fingertips, was caught up in the same spiritual ferment, first under the spell of Beecher, and later in his allegiance to the Swedenborgian church. He sought to manifest his subjective faith quest in paint, not by depicting specific places as such, but as suggestive states of minds drawn from imagination and memory. This transcendentalist tradition, the counterculture of its day, placed its faith in intuitive reason—the divine spark of reason; to wit, the subjective self.

Beecher, who spent much of life struggling to jettison the dark Calvinism of his father, became a liberating and inspirational figure to millions; he revived the flickering soul-light of old New England Puritanism in sunset tones of grace and love. The subsequent demand in New York art circles in the late 1870s and 1880s for an American art of high sentiment that expressed distinctly American values and themes was, at least partially, a result of what Beecher and his New England confreres had sown in the preceding decades. In effect, Beecher had infused American art, much of it through Inness and his

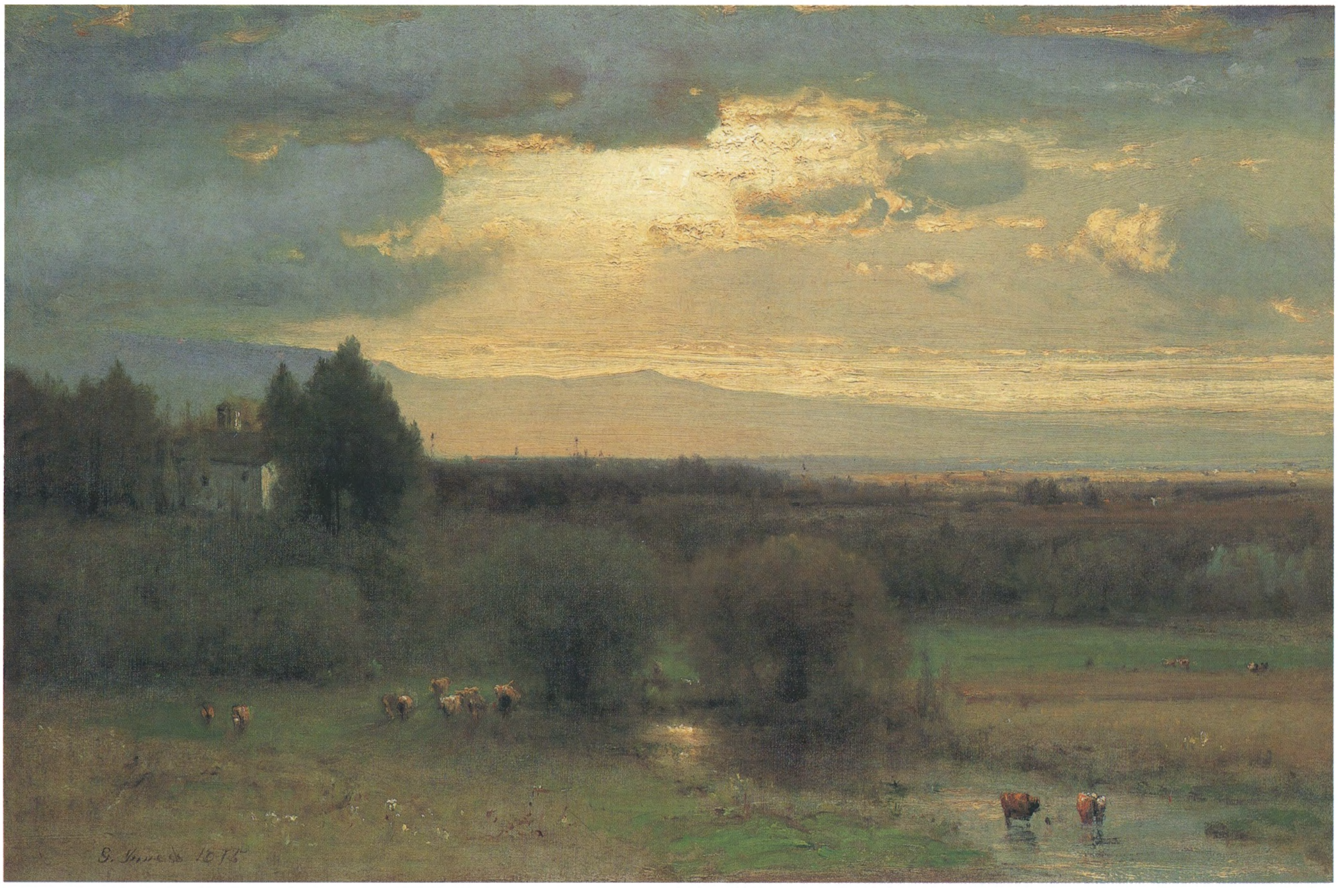


Fig. 2.13. George Inness, *Hudson Valley*, 1875. Oil on canvas, 20¼ x 30½ in. Private collection, New York.

Tonalist followers, with a religious dimension, a dimension composed of high-mindedness, sentiment (deep emotion but not sentimentality), nostalgia (love of home and family), imagination, and memory, as can be seen in Inness's *Hudson Valley*, 1875 (fig. 2.13). This religious impulse—today broadly framed as liberal Protestantism—somewhat secularized and certainly ecumenical, democratic, and rooted in the American soil, remained the expressive core of the Tonalist movement right through 1900 and beyond.

As will be seen in chapter 7, where the spiritual dimensions of Tonalism are examined in greater detail, Henry Ward Beecher was only one of many spiritual voices who took the transcendentalist reformist impulse at the heart of Emerson and Thoreau and repackaged it in more traditional religious garb. Beecher opined, "What a man sees in Nature . . . will therefore depend on what he has to see with . . . if he have all his physical senses, and nothing more, he will see the rind and the husk of Nature. . . . If he add imagination, he will find yet deeper insight; if feeling, deeper yet; if religious feeling, more profoundly; and if he hold all these things up against the background of the Infinite, then indeed, to his unspeakable satisfaction, the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork."[47] Much of this is a slightly altered paraphrase of Emerson's essay *Nature*. Inness, in turn, would move on from the religious exuberance of Beecher and his painterly style of the Medfield years to embrace the more esoteric doctrines of Swedenborgianism and its concomitant Tonalist style, which evoked the ambiguous and haunting correspondences of the material and spiritual realm. But Beecher's early influence on Inness and his patrons and the art market in general was, by any measure, formidable. In his essays of the 1840s and 1850s, and widely published in book form in 1855 and 1862, Beecher wrote in confessional tones of his experience of being drawn into nature through artwork—and he owned thousands of objects!—not so much by way of the seeing eye as by association and memory. "Certain places, nooks in a mountainside, clefts in rocks, sequestered dells—have their imputed life. Whenever we come back to these places it is as when one reads old letters, or a journal of old experiences, or meets old friends, that bring thronging back with them innumerable memories and renewed sensations of pleasure or sadness."[48] Beecher's enshrinement of memory in the American religious and aesthetic consciousness would reverberate time and time again throughout the history of Tonalism.

It is little wonder that Inness, his friends, patrons, and followers began sharing such a common allegiance to the memory-infused and elegiac poetry of the Tonalist landscape. As the 1870s turned into the 1880s, Inness's imagery became more simplified, verging on the symbolic, imagery conducive to triggering in the viewer associations with past experience, and further tapping into veins of subconscious memory, which in turn heightened the imaginative response to the artwork: memories past registering in the present moment, the "then" seeking alignment with the "now." This state of psychological flux, as the corresponding imagery of past and present resonates, is captured, or at least approximated on canvas in the optical refractionresulting from the play of cool overtones painted over warm undertones, or the vibration of similar tones placed side to side. Like the taste of Proust's madeleine, Inness's Tonalist landscapes began to reveal as much to the soul as to the eye, the thousands of memories stored since childhood—moments of wonder and apprehension embedded as much in dream and the subconscious as are time and space. For the weary and skeptical postwar generation, Inness's landscapes only grew in appeal as his paintings began, increasingly in the late 1880s, to take on the dimensions of dreamscapes, and ultimately reservoirs of spiritual reverie, offering solace for an age traumatized by change.

Inness and the New York Art World

When Inness was mysteriously forced to flee Medfield and Boston for New York in 1876, prompted in part by a financial crisis with his dealer, he found the New York art world much changed from what he had known in the late 1860s. Even the New York critics were beginning to come round to his new Tonalist work. *New York Times* writer Charles de Kay, and his circle (his sister Helena de Kay was married to Richard Watson Gilder, an influential editor at *Scribner's Magazine,* and later *The Century Magazine*), would become lifetime supporters of Inness, along with de Kay's Tonalist protégé and American visionary Albert Pinkham Ryder. De Kay recognized as early as 1873 the poetic charms of Inness's creations, the depth of religious feeling and striving after truth, and even the embedded Swedenborgian associations. "Mr. Inness is perhaps more susceptible to 'moods' than any other, and the result of these moods has been some of the most poetical pictures that have ever been produced in this country."[49] By 1882, six years after Inness's return to New York, de Kay considered Inness to be in the forefront of modern American art. "In the mind of Inness, religion, landscape, and human nature mingle so thoroughly that there is no separating the several ideas. . . . Inness is a modern to the last degree, and, thrown in upon himself by a scoffing world, tries to express his religious opinions under the veil of landscape. Perhaps that is saying too much. Do his landscapes hint of religion? Does he try to express religion? We should say no. It is rather the methods by which he does them that are governed in his own mind by religious ideas. . . . Let us, then, rather say of his religion that he does not express, but hides it, in his art."[50]

This watershed in American sensibility—the displacement of the Hudson River School by Tonalist spiritualized landscapes between 1876 and 1882—represented the confluence of many factors. We have seen how Henry Ward Beecher, along with Emerson and Thoreau, had altered the religious attitudes of the country. By 1877, foreigntrained Americans were filtering back into New York and exhibiting for the first time. Their impact, both style and subject, shattered American complacency and stirred up passionate battles among the critics and the cultural elite about the necessity of establishing a progressive American art not beholden to Europe. Increasingly, to many eyes, Inness filled the bill for a nationalist art. In the 1877 National Academy of Design annual exhibition, in which for the first time a critical mass of foreign-trained artists showed their work, Inness was praised for his recent landscapes, which displayed all the facility and charm of tone he had learned in his years abroad, but now applied to the American scene in a distinctive manner. In the scheme of things, these were still quite conventional landscapes—at least in regard to what the future would bring. Ironically, at the very moment when Inness had seemingly triumphed in the bastion of conservative taste, he turned in an even more innovative direction, as if he sensed the new winds of change blowing in from the Atlantic: he had no intention of being left behind. Painting in the Pompton Lakes area of New Jersey over the summer of 1877, Inness switched from thicker paint to a thinner mix of pigment and medium, which allowed him a new expressive power and exuberance, a freedom and fluidity and a reconcentration of his focus, resulting in a compressed symbolic energy previously untapped. His full powers as an artist were finally being unleashed.

A Gray Lowery Day, 1877 (fig. 2.14), is a near-totemic demonstration of the synthetic style that would characterize the art of Inness's last decade. By raising the horizon to a thin slat of pearly gray sky, the scene is not only forced forward toward the picture plane, but becomes more intimate and circumscribed, more personalized, more hushed, so that the piling up of magnificently brushed greens—"a symphony in tender green,"[51] so described by a contemporary critic—envelop the viewer. The subject is no longer so much about place or time as mood. The scene is enclosed in a kind of hortus conclusus, the kind of walled garden that the religiously minded found conducive to meditation, like the Zen garden of Japanese tradition. Beecher, writing about a similar painting, caught the flavor of *A Gray Lowery Day*: "Now & then he has a picture of perfect peace. The heavens & earth & he that look upon them are at deep rest. It tranquilizes the soul even to look upon it."[52] In another essay, Beecher, described the art of looking as a "bewitching reverie," a kind of dream state in which the eye can drift cloud-like across the scene, or as he observed: "the art of seeing is not to think about seeing."[53] It is no coincidence that one of the greatest turn-of-the-century patrons and collectors of Tonalism, Inness's manager and

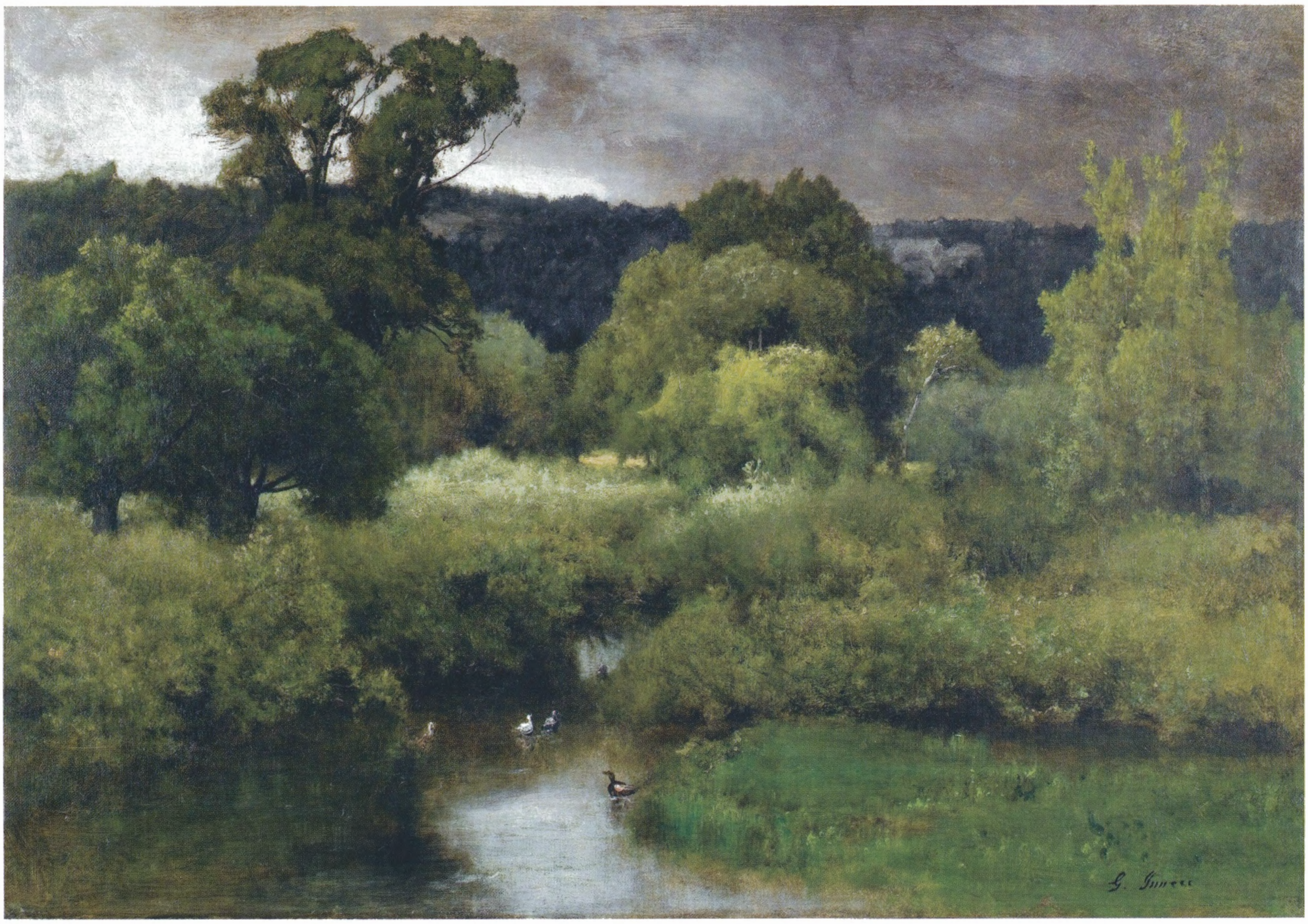


Fig. 2.14. George Inness, *A Gray Lowery Day*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 17⅞ x 25⁹⁄₁₆ in. Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Munn (Ruth C. Hanford, Class of 1909) in the name of the class of 1909.

dealer Thomas Clarke, first owned the painting. In 1899, *A Gray Lowery Day* was sold for more than $10,000, the highest price in the sale of Clarke's paintings.

Writing in 1917, Elliott Daingerfield, an early Inness biographer who was a close friend and also a Tonalist artist, had this to say about *A Gray Lowery Day*, partly in a defense of Inness from a new generation of artists who found his technique old-fashioned: "Have they ever seriously looked upon the 'Gray, Lowery Day,' a canvas painted rapidly, with no hint of glaze or fumble, a canvas in which the goal is reached with the precision of the great master? And such a goal! Here is no simple sketch of uninteresting objects, but a mood of nature so subtle that thought of it even is intangible and enveloped within intricacies of form so elaborate that the rendering of them under most passive conditions would tax the powers of any technician; and yet this envelope of moist, rainy atmosphere is rendered with a direct touch, a transfer of pigment to canvas as direct and exact as a Franz Hals or a John Sargent, both the gods of direct painting; and in the finished result Mr. Inness has produced a work of unity and pure beauty, enough in itself to proclaim him a world master."[54]

Inness Issues His Manifesto

During the summer and fall in which Inness painted *A Gray Lowery Day*, and a number of similarly superb landscapes of the Pompton Lakes, a revolution was afoot in New York art circles. In 1875 breakaway young artists had formed the Art Students League in reaction to the staid teaching at the National Academy of Design. More and more young expatriate artists back from their studies in Europe were joining Inness in New York: artists like William Merritt Chase, Frank Duveneck, John Henry Twachtman, Henry Muhrman, William Sartain, and Hugh Bolton Jones (with J. Frank Currier sending innovative watercolors and oils to New York for exhibition). Thomas Dewing had moved from Boston to New York, joining fellow New Englanders Robert Swain Gifford and Albert Pinkham Ryder, habitués of the Gilder circle. All would become founding members of the Society of American Artists, recruited over the summer and fall of 1877, along with George Inness. The society was to become the most important and radical arts organization of the last quarter of the nineteenth century (for the full story of the formation of the Society of American Artists see chap. 4). Inness was joined by fellow avatars of Tonalism John

La Farge (an instigator of the society's break with the National Academy), William Morris Hunt (Hunt died in 1879 but his *Talks on Art* was hugely influential in New York art circles), and ex-Hudson River School artists Alexander Wyant and Homer Dodge Martin. By late 1877, Inness had thrown in his lot with the radical forces in American art; he was no longer a lonely voice and his progressive brand of expressive Tonalism, evolved over so many years and through such hardships, was bolstered and energized by his new cohorts. In turn, Inness offered the rising generation a style of American art seemingly grounded in a native ethos. The coming synergy between young and old, the indigenous artists and the foreign trained, would become the most eventful and fascinating story in American art of the latter part of the nineteenth century.

In the first exhibition of the Society of American Artists in the winter of 1878, Inness showed *The Coming Storm*, 1878 (fig. 2.15). One of the hits of the show, it was even hailed by a critic as one of the best pictures ever painted in the country. Michael Quick has written, "It is a tour de force of vigorous direct painting, full of the energy of the act of painting, an integral part of its stormy subject. With that masterpiece Inness demonstrated to the young artists of the society that he could paint as well as any of them, and as powerfully."[55] After so many years of struggle, Inness found himself in the position of éminence grise—an American master and godfather to the evolving Tonalist School. In turn, he, too, would draw strength—and not a little anxiety—from the new men intent on taking over the New York art world; Inness and his younger cohorts would revolutionize American art within a matter of years. Surrounded by younger supporters and buoyed by growing critical acclaim, Inness was emboldened to take a stand in an 1878 article, "A Painter on Painting," in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*—and very publicly claimed his position in the avant-garde of American landscapists. The *Harper's* article constitutes a manifesto for the Tonalist School in the making. Ostensibly in an interview format, Inness set forth his guiding principles for landscape. Responding to the question, what is it that the painter tries to do, Inness wrote:

"Simply to reproduce in other minds the impressions which a scene has made upon him. A work of art does not appeal to the intellect. It does not appeal to the moral sense. Its aim is not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion. This emotion may be one of love, of pity, of veneration, of hate, of pleasure, or of pain; but it must be a single emotion, if the work has unity, as every such work should have, and the true beauty of the work consists in the beauty of the sentiment or emotion which it inspires. Its real greatness consists in the quality and the force of this emotion. Details in the picture must be elaborated only enough fully to reproduce the impression that the artist wishes to reproduce. When more than this is done, the impression is

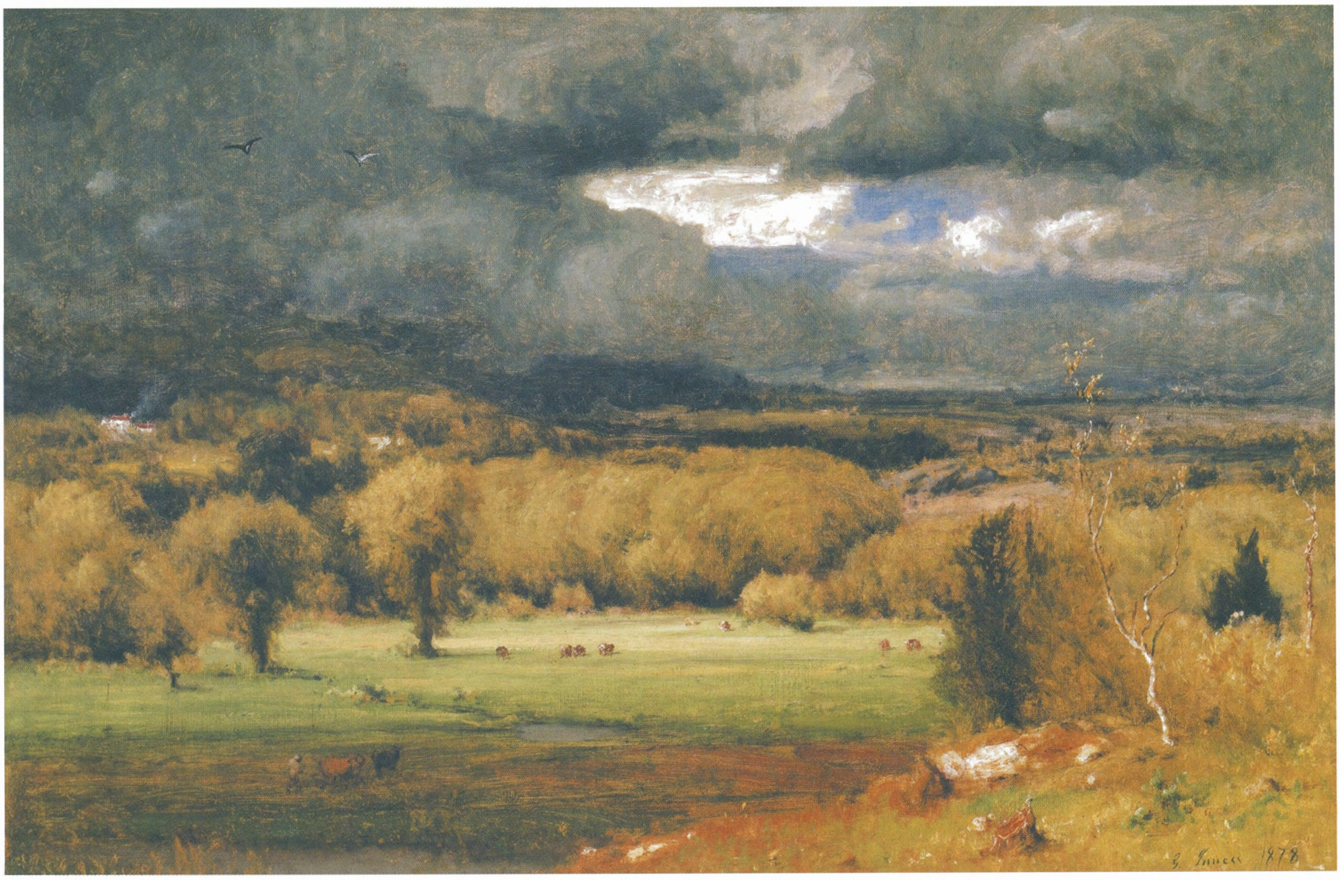


Fig. 2.15. George Inness, *The Coming Storm*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 26 x 38½ in. Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

weakened or lost, and we see simply an array of external things which may be very cleverly painted, and may look very real, but which do not make an artistic painting. The effort and the difficulty of an artist is to combine the two, namely, to make the thought clear and to preserve the unity of impression."[56]

Whether Inness in the late 1870s kept abreast of Whistler's battles in England against the high probity of the Pre-Raphaelites, or specifically embraced the growing influence of the Aesthetic movement, which decried anecdotal detail or moral injunctions in art, is difficult to know, but Whistler's anti-rhetorical stand is fully part of Inness's strategy. Inness insisted that an artwork must express a predominant sensation uncluttered by distracting detail. He achieved this in his best work with a unity and harmony of tone that contained and resolved "poetic truth" and "scientific truth," aesthetic and analytic truth—the component parts merged to express a compelling emotion. In this insistence on emotional truth-telling, Inness anticipated by thirty years the modernist manifestos of Wassily Kandinsky and the German aesthetician Wilhelm Worringer. Peter Gay, in his history of modernism, notes that Worringer's championing of individualistic subjectivity had set the academic groundwork for Kandinsky's excursions into abstraction: "In his thesis *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), which he billed, underscoring its emphasis on mind, as a 'Contribution to the Psychology of Style,' Worringer argued that modern aesthetics had 'taken the decisive step from aesthetic objectivism to aesthetic subjectivism.' What mattered in art—or rather, what should matter—are the emotions it arouses."[57] Inness's goal, akin to the metaphysics of Kandinsky's exploration of pure abstraction and soul re-enchantment, remained problematic: the notional storyteller in Inness would never quite retire from the field, and figurative anecdote found its way into many of his late synthetic canvases. Nevertheless, Inness had blazed the trail for abstraction, and his Tonalist colleagues, heeding Whistler's call, quickly learned to exorcise figures from their landscapes, until the pure landscape became the singular carrier of emotional meaning. Inness's notion of the "civilized landscape," as it was for Beecher, Thoreau, and Emerson, was grounded in the Romantic movement with its emphasis on free expression and the imagination's dynamic and creative interaction with nature, a point Inness made clear in his 1878 manifesto: "Every artist who without reference to external circumstances, aims truly to represent the ideas and emotions which come to him when he is in the presence of nature, is in process of his own spiritual development, and is a benefactor of his race... Some persons suppose that landscape has no power of communicating human sentiment. But this is a great mistake. The civilized landscape peculiarly can; and therefore I love it more and think it more worthy of reproduction than that which is savage and untamed. It is more significant. Every act of man, every thing of labor, effort, suffering, want, anxiety, necessity, love, marks itself where it has been."[58]

The critic Royal Cortissoz, writing from the perspective of 1925, recognized the ways in which George Inness had revolutionized American art. "If the old methods of the Hudson River school are no longer valid, if the 'natural magic' that now holds sway is one concerned in utter freedom with the everlasting truths of light and air and color, if our painters and their public explore the intimacies of nature in a spirit of sympathy and understanding, it is largely because Inness found the key to a more beautiful world. He accustomed us to a different kind of landscape, and he established it as the right one. He liberated us from an inadequate tradition and gave us a new standard to live by. Only a man of genius could have done it."[59]

Inness's unremitting struggle to render in paint the subjective visions he carried in his head was the source of many spoiled and failed paintings—the numberless starts he could never find a way of finishing. Everything he did suggested something more or something better, or possibilities unplumbed. His son maintained that for all his father's visionary idealism and Swedenborgian symbolism, and his unrelenting manipulation of paint for effect, Inness's bedrock respect for the raw data of the natural world remained paramount. In fact, his dedication to those natural facts—the characteristic shapes of particular trees, the color and leaf display of meadow flowers, the meteorological specifics of weather—made it impossible for him to construct anything that was not technically accurate. It was this commitment to objective truth while respecting the truth of the artist's inner soul that distinguished Inness's best work, at the same time explaining much of Inness's unevenness. Inness's drive to achieve a full harmony of tone along with allegiance to local color—natural appearance—was a difficult trick; he abhorred falling into the muddle of producing "dishwater" or "pea soup" on canvas. The delicate balance of color and form, the push and pull of light and dark values, as Hans Hoffman would describe it to a later generation, was never easily achieved. Inness could be careless, and even Henry Ward Beecher, a fervent admirer and "an early and habitual buyer of Innesses," readily admitted that Inness could be the best and the worst American painter. When Inness got it right, producing a coruscating inner light, melting natural forms, and brilliance of raw color, he was without peer. And it was this hard-won double allegiance to truth—spiritual and aesthetic—that ultimately triumphed over truth to the nature of the Hudson River School.

The discussion in chapter 4 will take up Inness's late work of the 1880s and early 1890s when it can best be appreciated against the backdrop of the young American artists—with their stylistic and technical advances—who returned from Europe in those years.

Homer Dodge Martin and Alexander Wyant

Homer Dodge Martin and Alexander Wyant, originally Hudson River School artists, were near contemporaries of Inness and reinvented themselves as Tonalists in the 1870s. They, too, played a pivotal role in the emergence of the Tonalist movement. Inness, Martin, and Wyant, by century's end, were acclaimed as the originators of the Tonalist movement, if not the greatest landscape painters of their generation. (Homer, Whistler, and La Farge, too, made it onto most lists in 1900.) By 1900 the three were considered exemplars of the American landscape school, distinguished by an array of traits: possessing true sentiment, masculine and virile in outlook, vigorous in paint handling, natural in approach, and independent of vision—fresh, sincere, sane, and individual. Examining Martin and Wyant, and later the synthetic landscapes of Inness and his younger colleagues in the 1880s, it is useful to weigh the factors that produced such claims of distinctive "Americanness." This first-generation triumvirate—born before 1840, separating them from their younger followers, the second-generation Tonalists born between 1840 and 1865—matured in the decades of dominance by the Hudson River School and experienced the shocks of the Civil War firsthand. Of the three, Inness and Martin endured the brunt of negative criticism when they deviated from the prevailing norm. Wyant managed a seamless segue into Tonalism in the 1860s, and by and large slipped under the radar screen of negative opinion. If anything, critics like Charles de Kay scolded him for a tardiness in fully embracing the new style that he had effortlessly adopted. None of the three had recourse to a long period of formal academic training in Europe and were, primarily, self-taught, influenced by Constable and the French Barbizon tradition, and they ultimately drew strength from one another. In this, they were considered homegrown originals. Unlike the civilized landscape of Inness, something of the wildness and raw loneliness beyond the boundaries of of human habitation that characterized their Hudson River School years endured in the work of Homer Dodge Martin and Alexander Wyant. Inness was driven by a fervent spiritual impulse, but one thoroughly domesticated; Martin was moved by the deep melancholy wellsprings of his nature and his early wandering in the wilderness; and Alexander Wyant, of the three, was the meditative poet: a spirit forever hovering on the edges of the forest primeval.

Homer Dodge Martin (1836–97)

Of the first-generation triumvirate, the extraordinary reputation of Homer Dodge Martin is the most difficult to fully grasp today. Most of his accessible or readily visible work is early, in the Hudson River School mode of detailed, accurate renditions of nature—much in the vein of John Frederick Kensett, but with a dark forbidding quality that is Martin's alone. His later Tonalist work retains something of this haunting melancholy, the solitude of the disturbed soul. The works upon which his great reputation rests were produced in the late 1870s and 1880s and through to his death in 1897. His Tonalist paintings are comparatively few in number, their quality can be uneven, and some may have deteriorated over time. Martin's biographer, Frank Jewett Mather, maintained that Martin's technical weakness (possibly a result of impaired eyesight and certainly failing health in the mature works) was also his strength, allowing the fullest expression of his troubled mind. "Yet it is precisely the twilight and occasionally unsure vision of Homer Martin that we value. And the unsureness in no wise affects what he has to say to us. Beautiful pattern, vibrating color, distinguished mood—all these things are precisely and fully conveyed."[60] Mather saw Martin as the innovative heir of Thomas Cole, having narrowed his inspiration to the intimate and private side of nature. "It was Martin's personal distinction to convey more powerfully than any American contemporary the elegiac poetry of our primeval scenery, while also catching the richer pathos of sea-beaten and immemorially inhabited Normandy."[61]

Born in Albany, New York, in 1836, eleven years Inness's junior, Martin lacked the older artist's early exposure to a wider cultural milieu. But Martin was innately gifted and impelled by

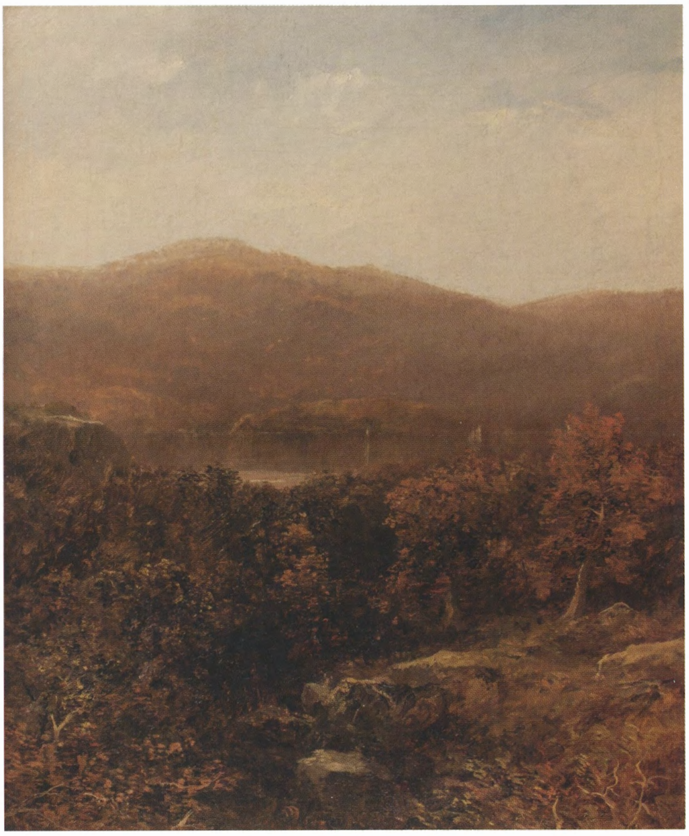


Fig. 2.16. Homer Dodge Martin, *The Hudson, Early Autumn*, c. 1870. Oil on canvas, 17 x 14 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

his nature to a life in art. As a child and a young man, he was rarely without pencil in hand and spent almost all his free time sketching. His parents despaired of his ability to do anything but be an artist. Though he had some brief instruction from Hudson River artists James Hart, and later, James Smillie, Martin was largely self-taught and early on went to the Catskills, Adirondacks, and White Mountains to hone his descriptive style, producing superbly rendered stretches of the wilderness. He made many drawings on these trips and so acquired a deep feeling for and familiarity with the physiognomy of nature, a repertoire of imagery that would serve him well in his later years when he was ailing and nearly blind. Much of his late work was conceived out of memory, and like for Inness, this was a blessing and curse to his art. Mather described this process as intellectualizing, although it may have more to do with the way Martin internalized his experience. Even his Hudson River School work lacks the overly fastidious nuances characteristic of the style, and tends to broader paint application and often a brooding moodiness that is quite uncanny. *The Hudson, Early Autumn*, circa 1870 (fig. 2.16), is a lush and warm fall landscape, possibly near the artist's birthplace of Albany. A fully loaded brush and the blending of lyrical forms give the scene a blurred atmospheric quality that presages Martin's later Tonalist landscapes. The critic Charles Caffin noted that a congenital astigmatism, which kept Martin out of the ranks in the Civil War, caused the artist to see the world in masses and not in crisp outline, a condition that presumably affected the precision of his Hudson River painting but was congenial for the Tonalist style of his later years.

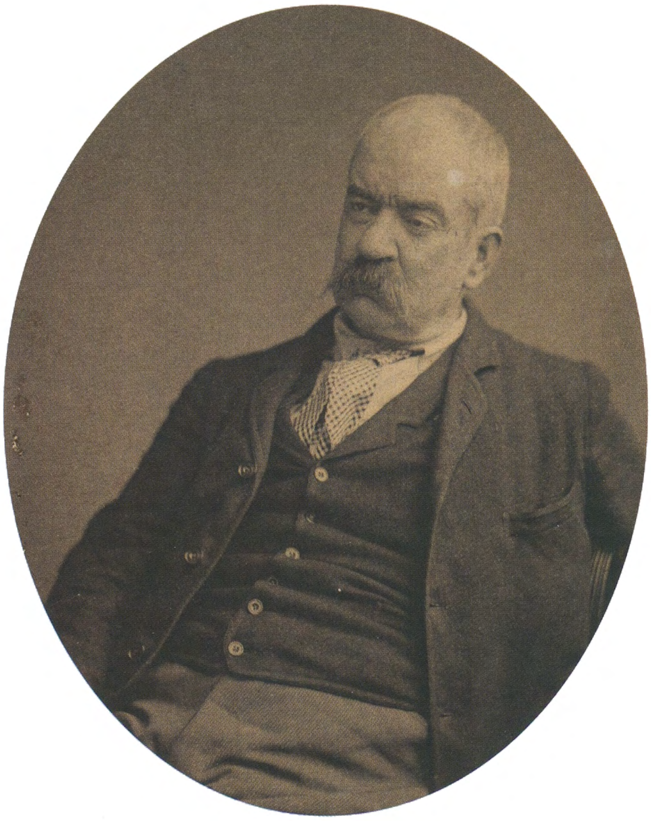


Fig. 2.17. Homer Dodge Martin, 1892.
Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Upon his move to New York in 1864, he shared a studio with John La Farge at the Tenth Street Studio Building, then a center for the finest Hudson River School painters. Martin and La Farge and Winslow Homer all became close friends, spending many happy hours together at the Century Club. By all accounts Martin was a voluble character, a witty raconteur and rollicking clubman, but prone to mood swings. Many found his large face, bulbous nose, and poor complexion repellent (fig. 2.17). His friends differed, choosing to dwell on his charm and convivial personality. At times he withdrew from society and went for long periods during which he could not paint. According to his long-suffering wife, he could never explain this inability to work except when in the throes of inspiration: "I do not know where the impulse comes from, nor why it stays away. All I know is that when it comes I can do nothing but paint; and when it goes away I can do nothing but dawdle."[62] Only prompting from his wife could move him to fulfill commissions to illustrate articles for magazine editors—work he despised. Martin was intuitive, intelligent, well read in his way, a lover of Keats (he could recite "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by heart), but utterly unable to manage his affairs. His wife, a talented writer and editor, despaired over their ever-precarious finances. They were constantly in debt and often in desperate straits. Martin's spare and stoic Tonalist paintings of the late 1870s and 1880s—with something of a pagan wildness about them—barely sold in his lifetime and were never popular. Or, as the inimitable Mather wrote of Martin's art: "Its frequent somberness was against it in an age very cheerful over its own vulgarity. New riches did not care to linger in desolate places which only God and Homer Martin had found good."[63]

Such desolation abounds in *Lake Sanford in the Adirondacks*, 1870 (fig. 2.18), exhibited at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 and long on view at the Century Club. This brooding low-keyed panorama viewed from the high angle of a storm- or fire-ravished mountaintop shows Martin's transition from his early Hudson River style; the grand vistas, the dramatically sublime wildness of untamed nature, and the blasted trees in the middle ground hark back to traditional formulas—except that the artist's expressive fingerprints are everywhere. The mood of detached foreboding and loneliness evoked in the rising mists and scored cliff face is as much a projection of an inner state as exacting topology—a transcript of the artist's often depressive state of mind, according to almost all who knew him. The painting recalls the thoughts of another pagan poet and kindred spirit to Martin, Henry David Thoreau, as he gazed out from the slopes of Mount Ktaadn (now spelled "Katahdin") in Maine. "It was vast, Titanic, and such as man

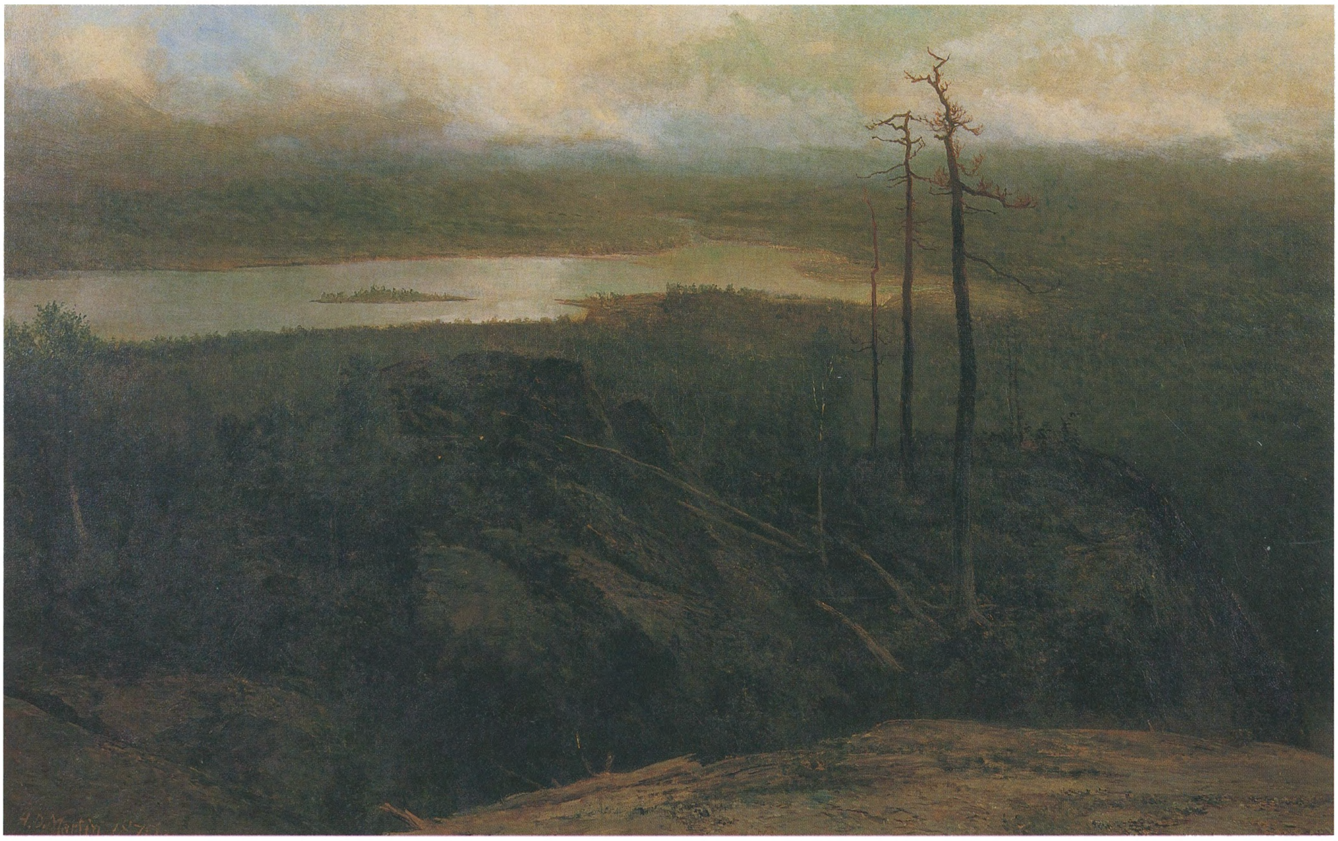


Fig. 2.18. Homer Dodge Martin, *Lake Sanford in the Adirondacks*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 24 x 40 in. The Century Association.

never inhabits. Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more lone than you can imagine. There is less substantial thought and fair understanding in him than in the plains where men inhabit . . . inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. She does not smile on him as in the plains. She seems to say sternly, Why came ye here before your time?"[64] *Lake Sanford in the Adirondacks* presages the bittersweet tonal poetry of Martin's final decades.

By the mid-1870s, Martin was already under the sway of Corot, and presumably his studio mate and friend John La Farge had encouraged his acquaintance with the French Barbizon master. Martin also must have been well acquainted with La Farge's delicate and nuanced tonal landscapes of Newport by this time, a place of raw shorelines and mists he, too, would be drawn to in his last years. Something of La Farge's delicate touch is found in *Trees in a Field*, circa 1875 (fig. 2.19), a meditative landscape of echoing tree forms and soft-edged tonal planes; the place has the feel of the known and habitual, perhaps a private stopping place, and displays Martin's growing interest in these years for more intimate scenes. Over the course of the 1870s, Martin began limiting details in his landscapes; his facture was both supple and delicate, his sense of tone more rarefied. In doing so he was heavily criticized for painting under French influence and being unpatriotic. Unlike Inness, who often kept to the outward forms of the Hudson River School during his decades of experimentation, enough to appeal to even his harshest critics, Martin's move toward a looser and more expressive style in the late 1870s seemed to have turned traditionalists against him. He never quite managed to come up with the exhibition triumph that might have stabilized his career and generated market cachet. He suffered financially. A trip to Europe in 1876 with stops in London, Paris, Amsterdam, and The Hague furthered Martin's acquaintance with the Barbizon painters and other modern stylistic trends. In a studio visit with Whistler, Martin would have seen his infamous Nocturnes (his wife who accompanied him on his visit remembers the Nocturnes hanging on the walls of the artist's studio), an encounter that may well have influenced Martin's late style.

By the time of his return to New York in 1877, Martin was immediately recruited, presumably by John La Farge, to join the fledgling radicals in the Society of American Artists, thus confirming his status as one of the "art for art sakers." In an 1879 review of Martin's work in the annual exhibition of the new society, the *New York Times'* Charles de Kay, who was describing Inness in similar glowing terms at this time, praised Martin's landscapes above all others and noted how the artist had broken with the tired tradition of his one-time confreres of the Hudson River School. "No other picture here has so much restfulness and deep beauty in the landscape, unless it be another landscape by the same painter.... And yet, to the untrained eye, they are astonishingly like a hundred other landscapes seen year after year on the walls of the academy. They are faithful reproductions of American scenery with which we are all familiar. But the others were dreary and flat, while these, by some strange means, are luminous and suggestive of poetic thoughts. The key to this riddle must be found in the painter. The hundred were merely blind copyists of nature; Mr. Martin has the soul of a poet."[65] De Kay was a partisan of the radical forces behind the Society of American Artists, and by the early 1880s had long been a supporter of Inness, and would soon support Ryder and eventually Blakelock. De Kay reviewed Martin's contributions to the rival National Academy that same month, noting, "the artist's well-grounded fame as a most delicately sensitive interpreter of charms in nature which few people are given the faculty to see." In his review, de Kay is fully emboldened to employ the new criteria (with just a touch of elitist zing) for a distinctive American art central to the Tonalist movement, an art that touches on the wellsprings of subjective experience. "His [Martin's] 'Sand Dunes' in the North Room cannot be overlooked... they are too original and bold in composition to escape notice. The foreground shows a feeling for the peculiar growth of plants in the seacoast sandhills, and of their warm color. The horizon, where sky and water blend indistinctly, is beautifully rendered; the atmospheric effects are also fine. Mr. Martin has qualities that one misses in the work of Mr. Homer, and possibly would be none the worse for some of the crispness of the latter."[66] De Kay goes on to note the lack of harmony and depth of feeling in Homer, a deficit that Homer would address in his own terms in his late seascapes of the 1890s. Clearly, by 1879, Martin had joined forces with the most progressive circles in American art. By 1882, de Kay described Martin as "one of the foremost landscapists now living."[67]

Woodland Pool (Andante: Fifth Symphony), 1880 (fig. 2.20), a masterpiece beloved by Mather, again suggests Whistler's influence in its allusion to Beethoven's symphony. Painted between Martin's first and second European trips (a pianist played the music for Martin as he painted in his studio), "*Andante*," Mather noted featured enchanting refinements (which were on view in the society's exhibitions of 1879), a style soon abandoned for his late bold and heavy impasto: "The general color is extraordinarily modulated grays qualified by broad touches of russet and green. The surface is of a silken

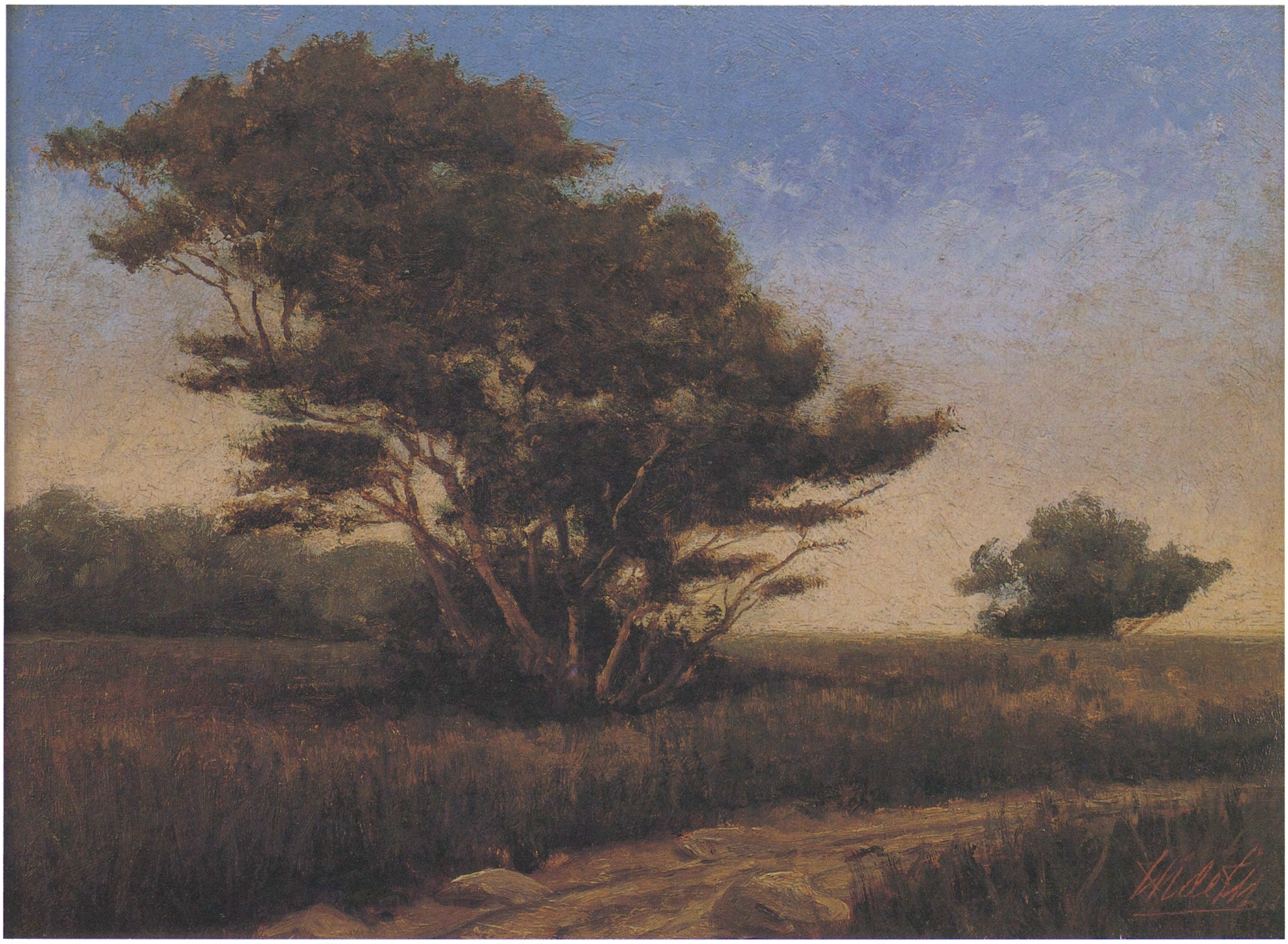


Fig. 2.19. Homer Dodge Martin, *Trees in a Field*, c. 1875. Oil on board, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

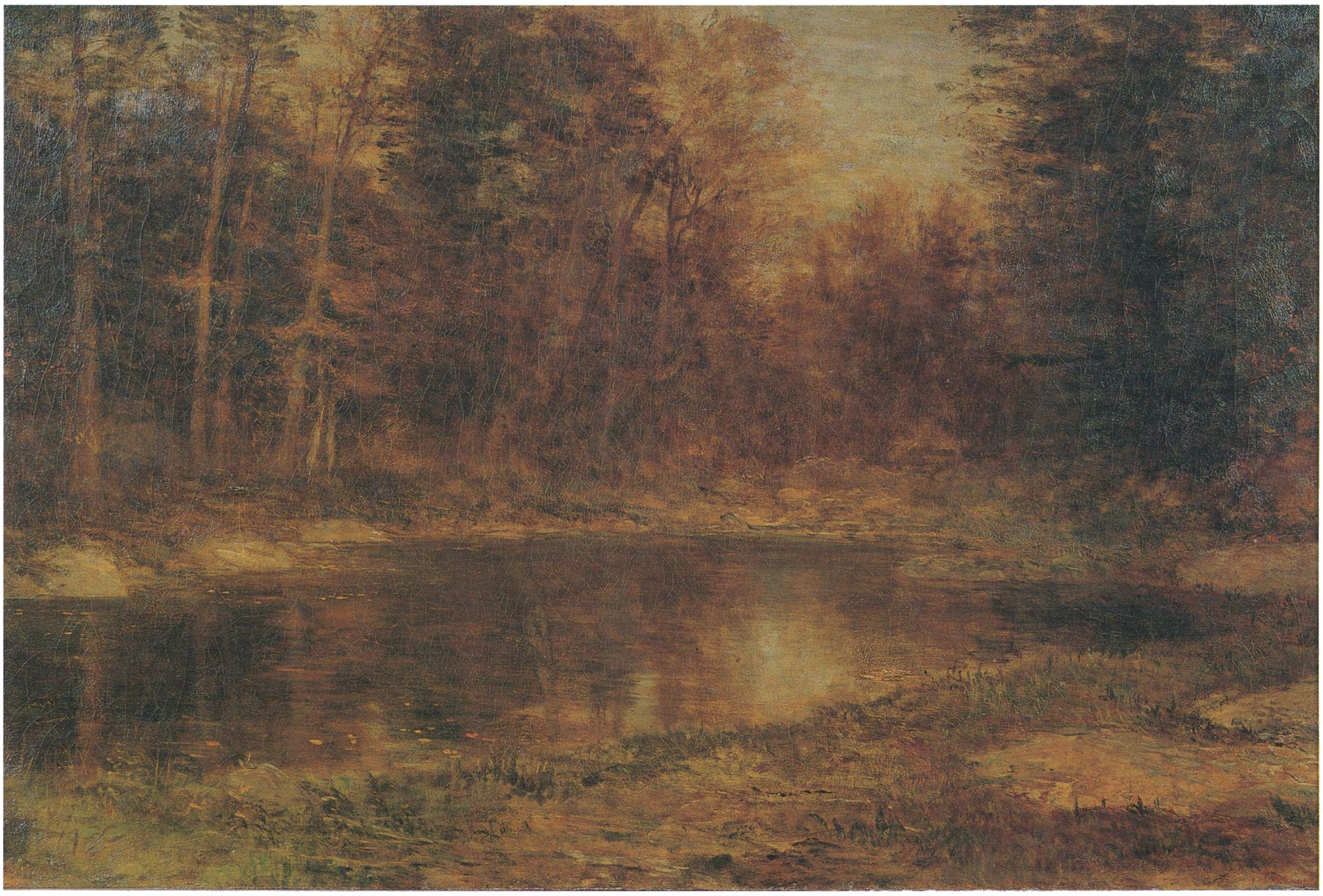


Fig. 2.20. Homer Dodge Martin, *Woodland Pool (Andante: Fifth Symphony)*, 1880. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. The Century Association.

thinness and of a similarly subdued luminosity. In its contrasts of preciseness and mystery the picture obeys the Japanese law that every composition must be clearly divided into a masculine and a feminine part. Perfect tone is achieved without sacrifice of local color."[68] The soft-edged intimacy of *Woodland Pool,* reminiscent of the kind of hidden, shadowy forest enclosures that Alexander Wyant was then popularizing, is rare in Martin's later work. For Mather, the painting represented a poignant "if only" in Martin's career, a vein of poetic endeavor that Martin failed to pursue with his second trip to Europe. An 1880 *Art Journal* review, trying to explain Martin's innovative style, alluded to Corot's dreamy effects and noted Martin's proclivity to generate expressions of his inner imagination as opposed to simple inspiration drawn from the scene at hand. "It can scarcely be said . . . that in the department of absolutely pure painting—in that department where Nature's services as an ally are dispensed with, so far as the pictorial impression intended to be conveyed is concerned; where the artist depends solely upon his art for the strength and value of the emotions that he excites—Mr. Martin is either most frequently found or most felicitous when found."[69]

In 1881 Martin returned to England on assignment to do some illustrations for the *The Century Magazine*, only to relocate to the French fishing village of Villerville in 1882, and later Honfleur, Normandy, where he and his wife would live until their return to New York in 1886. In these four years, away from the clamorous bustle of New York and steeped in the immemorial rhythms of a rural world, where the lives of the inhabitants were so closely tied to the land and sea, Martin evolved a fresh and bold style of thickly applied impasto, a wet-into-wet application of pigment that made for rough-edged yet exquisitely modulated tones. *Normandy Shore,* 1884 (fig. 2.21), displays Martin's new feeling for broadly brushed pigments dabbed in energized horizontal patterns that reflect something of the stark and hardscrabble life along this sea-scoured coastline. This is a world far removed from Boudin's cheerful scenes of holiday strollers on the beach in nearby Trouville, though something of Boudin's tonal feel for the atmosphere along the Normandy seacoast lingers. Martin's pebbly, seemingly weather-beaten paint surfaces are very much his own. His lush facture verges on Impressionist technique, except for the absence of primary or warm colors and the artist's insistence on earthy low, toned hues: grays, browns, olive greens, and stark blacks. No dazzling sunshine finds its way into Martin's overcast world. The rugged, almost mosaic quality of pigment approximates in texture the rough rock-strewn sand flats and the sea-buffeted bluffs behind. The recession from left to right, compressed under bluffs that have

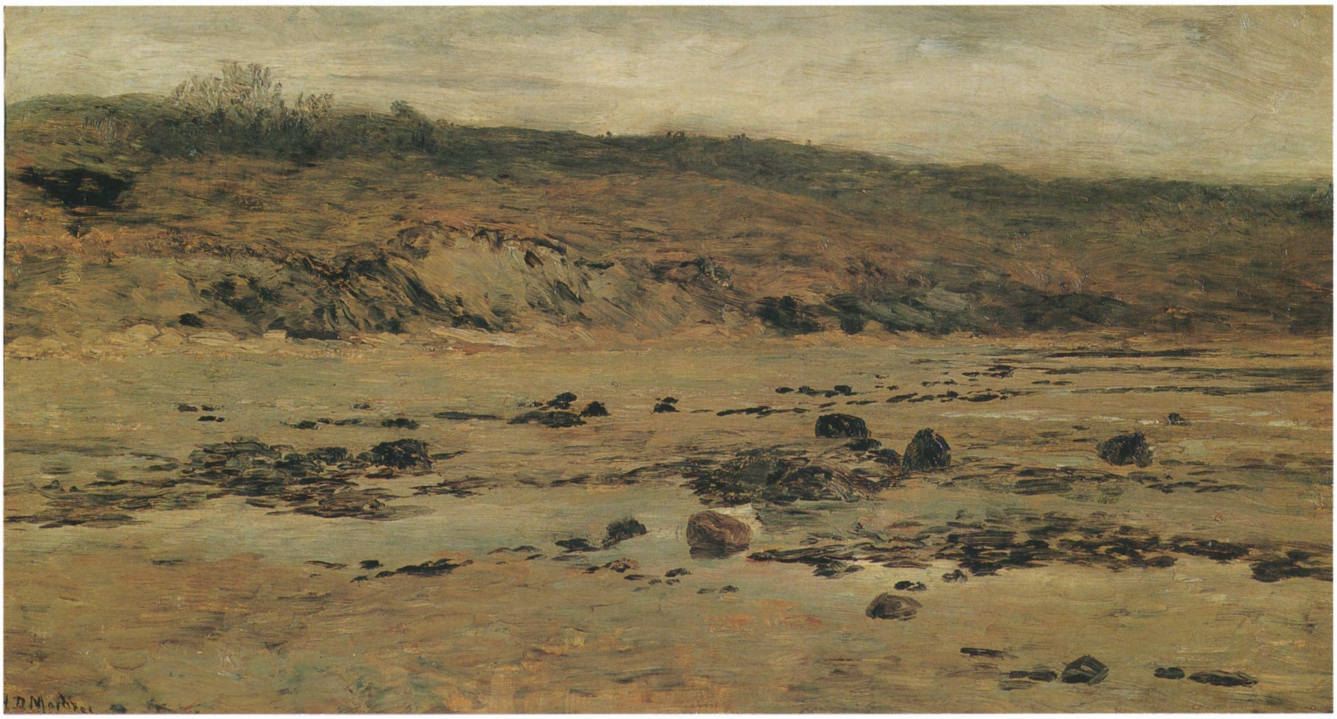


Fig. 2.21. Homer Dodge Martin, *Normandy Shore,* 1884. Oil on canvas, 12 x 24 in. Private collection.

a kind of kinetic counterflow in the brush marks, adds to the inherent tension—not unlike an invisible tidal current, which in turn pushes the surface pigments to the picture plane—precipitating a powerful vortex of visual energy. Under a dour and gray sky, a few rocks are given definition with a flick of pigment, as much a reflection of the artist's brooding mind as a rendition of place. As early as 1905, art historian Samuel Isham saw Martin's technical innovations—early and late—as picturing the artist's underlying emotional state. "The real essentials (the feeling for the relations of mass, for the exact difference of tone between the sky and the solid earth, the sense of subtle color) are the same and under every change of surface remains the same deep, grave melancholy, sobering but not saddening, which is the keynote of Martin's work."[70] Poor as they were, the years along the Normandy coast were the happiest for Martin and his wife.

Lake George, circa 1884 (fig. 2.22), possibly painted from memory while he was in France, displays Martin's facile ability to move from one expressive style to another, simply guided by the emotions in play at the moment of conception. The exceptional freedom of the paint handling, the sheer exuberance of the waves of careening color, gives the scene an energy both thrilling and yet quietly moving. The supple tree at the right, its trunk captured in the gleam of fading light, projects great symbolic power; it is a thing more of memory, of metamorphosis—the invisible hand of nature held in check by the mind's eye—rather than a mere recording of natural data. A similar painting of 1884 with the same title was owned by the greatest Tonalist collector of the day, William Evans.[71]

Returning to New York in 1886, Martin continued a process he had begun in France of freely reprising scenes from sketches and memory. While in France, he had painted a scene of Lake Ontario and back in New York he began to work up ideas derived from his stay in France. Increasingly, as his eyesight failed, Martin drew on imagination and memory for inspiration. The late paintings are, on the whole, projections of inner states. *Honfleur Light,* circa 1890 (fig. 2.23), painted years after Martin's return from France, contains much of the penumbral enchantment of days past along the Normandy coast. The dull rhythmic tones and the contrary force fields of rough pigments describing wave and cloud actions have a hypnotic effect. The stark lighthouse, too, with its beacon against the bleak headland, further instills a feeling of loneliness, something akin to the lingering aural sensation of tidal currents recollected in solitude and silence. French light—the pearly gray light so remarked upon by legions of American expatriate artists in Brittany and Normandy—or its approximation at dawn and dusk and overcast days permeates Martin's American works during his last years.

From 1886 until 1897, Martin painted his handful of late masterworks, although few sold. Adding to his financial straits, he suffered from declining health, blindness in one eye, a cataract in the other, and a slow ebbing of his powers. He was supported by a few patrons and by the friendship of La Farge (who had converted Martin's wife to Catholicism). La Farge's influence on Martin's life and art seemed to culminate in a fascinating coda in his brilliant late paintings of Newport—including *Wild Coast Newport,* circa 1885–95 (fig. 2.24) and

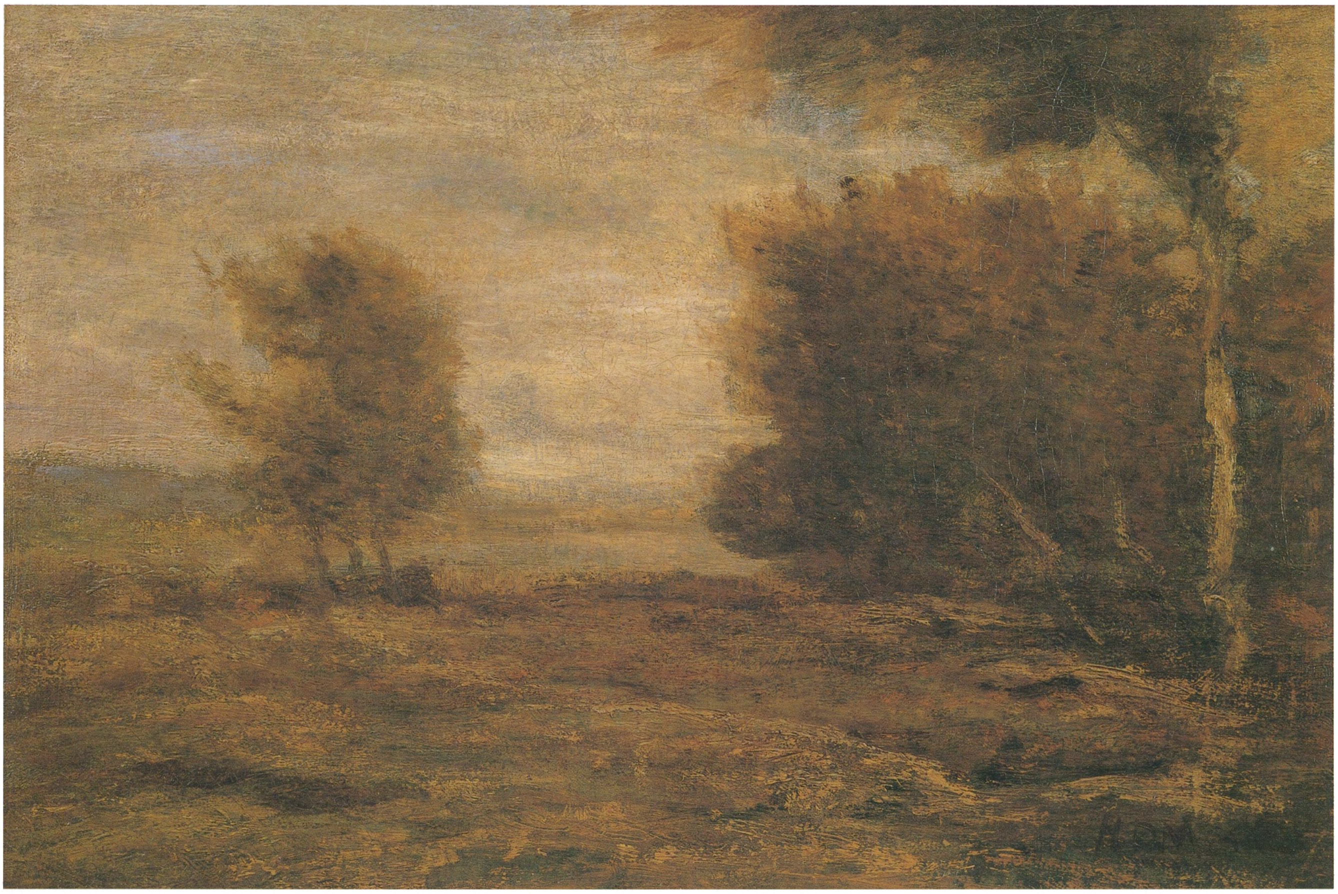


Fig. 2.22. Homer Dodge Martin, *Lake George*, c. 1884. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Private collection.

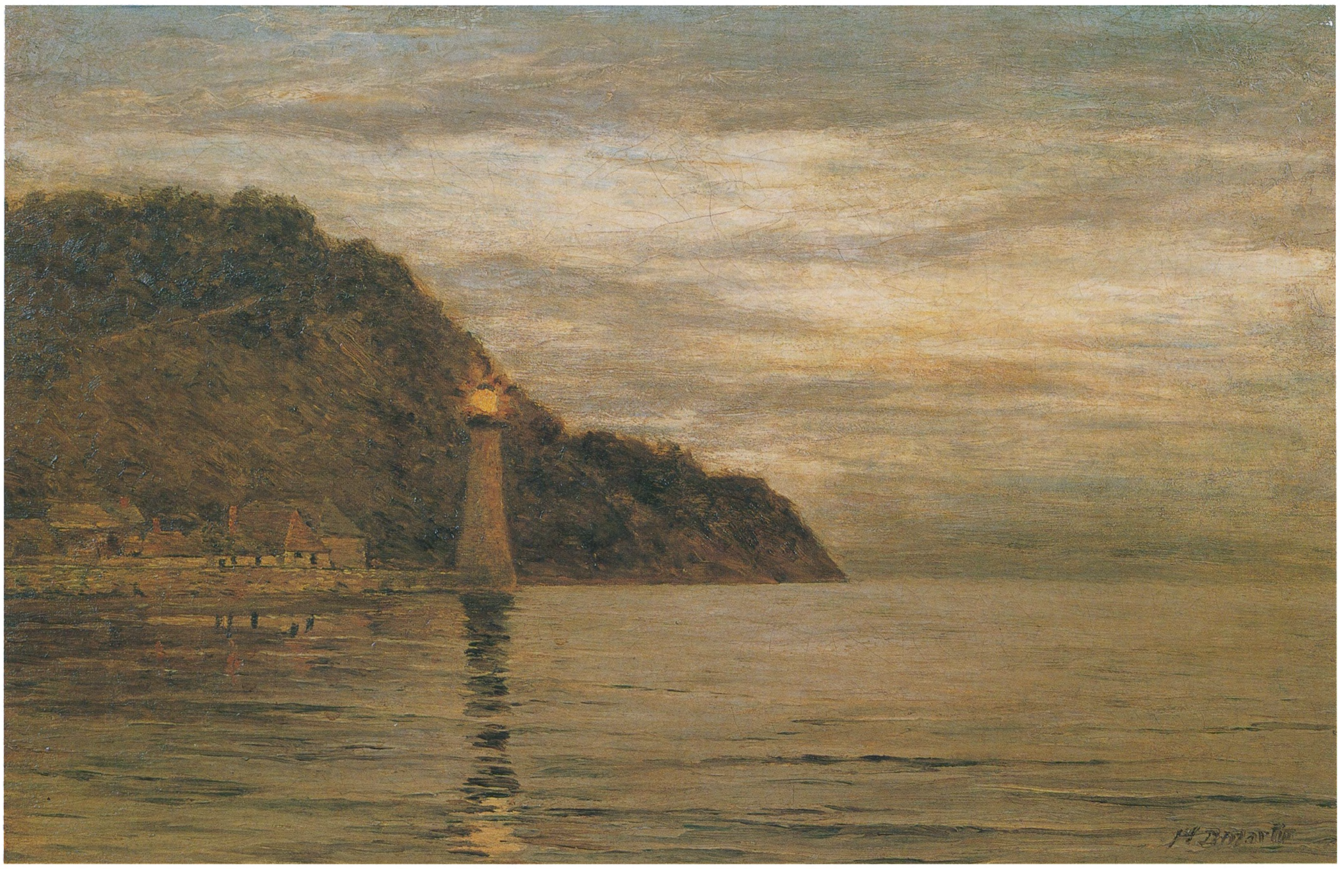


Fig. 2.23. Homer Dodge Martin, *Honfleur Light*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 23 x 36 in. The Century Association.

Newport Neck, 1893 (fig. 2.25)—the same coastal areas of rocks and bluffs that had inspired La Farge in the 1860s. Martin and La Farge had shared a studio since 1864, so Martin must have known La Farge's Newport works well and absorbed something of their essential spirit. In fact, Martin had exhibited Newport subjects at the Society of American Artists as early as 1882, when he was living in France, evidence that he had probably spent time in Newport with La Farge in the late 1870s. Though Martin's vigorous colorist brushstrokes are distinctive, there is certainly a family resemblance between his Newport subjects and La Farge's *Paradise Valley,* 1866–68, and *The Last Valley—Paradise Rocks,* 1867–68 (see chap. 1, figs. 1.19–1.20). One suspects that La Farge's close relationship with Martin spanning almost three decades played a profound role in moving Martin first toward a more nuanced and color-infused late-Barbizon style, and later toward the subtle and exquisitely balanced tonal harmonies that La Farge favored in his painting and stained glass. It may be, too, that the Newport coastline with its damp atmospheric sea air, approximating that of the Normandy coast, attracted Martin, as it had Hunt and La Farge in the late 1850s. This point was noted by Charles de Kay in his 1882 review of Martin's Newport painting, which the critic observed, "gives an unmistakable note of Newport in the fluidity and moist depth of the atmosphere, which is said to be more like that of the British Isles than any other portion of America.... It has a magical effect, and may well entitle Mr. Martin to be held one of the foremost landscapists now living."[72]

Both *Wild Coast Newport* and *Newport Neck* hark back to the bleak and forbidding coastlines of Normandy, and even to Martin's earlier Hudson River–style paintings; though not of the wilderness per se, these late Newport works evoke much of the wildness and remoteness of earlier times. They illuminate Thoreau's assertion, "Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest."[73] These paintings reprise Martin's fondness for bare rocky outcroppings and inhospitable spots. Even though the Newport pictures are panoramic in scope, there is a psychological intimacy produced by crowding heavy tactile pigment into the foreground plane and emphasizing the rough textures of the overhanging sky. Surely something of Inness's late landscapes had gotten under Martin's skin, though with a somberness unrelieved by Inness's spiritualizing grace.

Today, Martin might be described as a formalist; he moved and altered his natural forms like props on a stage set. His surfaces show enormous physicality and feel for the manipulation of paint. Martin was not religious in any conventional sense (on death's door he refused a Catholic priest) and the spirit that infuses his greatest work—right down to his thick impasto—retains something of the wildness and pagan spirit of his earliest forays into untamed nature. Nature was a reservoir, a kind of conceptualist warehouse of ideas, and ultimately a creative source that he exploited at will, but only when the spirit moved him. Without inspiration he was powerless. In this, he fits the evolving paradigm of the major Tonalist artists of his day—masculine, individual, and natural—who were moved by an authentic "American" spirit embodied in the land. In Martin there is little of Inness's spiritual or mystic reveries, or the comforts of home ground. In contrast, Inness was constantly refreshing his repertoire of natural motifs from the spiritual realm he fathomed on his field trips to Florida and elsewhere. Martin, certainly in his decline, was a wellspring unto himself.

Charles Caffin, in *The Story of American Painting,* called Martin "a child of nature; subject to variableness of mood, reckless of consequences. This was the man—a child. It was only the artist in him that grew up and matured; knit by bonds of serious tenderness to the mother earth, from whose loins he had come, and at whose breast he fed, understanding her voice by instinct, while her heart throbbed to the movement of his own. In a word, he did not absorb nature and then pass it through the prism of his own consciousness, as Inness and Wyant did, and most poetic landscape painters do, but himself passed into nature and became once more conceived in her, afterwards employing the strength of his intellect to express, as it were, the secrets of the womb... that made him able to recover from her the elemental feeling, and to render it in a manner at once so large, simple, and profound."[74]

This extraordinary encomium by a near-contemporary of Martin is an important insight, not only into Martin's greatness, but as an expression of what the Tonalists and their patrons valued above all things. The popular conception of the Victorian age as stuffy and materialistic is belied by the wonder and profound emotion artists such as Martin generated. If Inness was more attuned to the idealist metaphysics epitomized by Emerson, Beecher, and Swedenborg, Martin was a kindred spirit of Thoreau—a pagan cousin. Just as Martin spent many of his earlier years sketching nature—exquisitely fine and beautifully detailed draftsmanship—so Thoreau trekked around Concord and as far afield as Mount Ktaadn in Maine, channeling nature's visible energies into his writings. Nature's many moods spoke directly to Thoreau, absent a divine intercessor; all were a mirror to his inquiring mind, as was the case with Martin, thus galvanizing the poet's search for the existential truth of man's place in the world. "If any part of nature excites our pity, it is for ourselves we grieve, for there is eternal health and beauty. We get only transient and partial glimpses of the beauty of the world. Standing at the right angle, we are dazzled by the colors of the rainbow in colorless ice.... What if we could daguerreotype our thoughts and feelings! for I am surprised and enchanted often by some quality which I cannot detect. I have seen an attribute of another world and condition of things."[75] On the brink of the Darwinian revolution that would raise as many issues concerning man and

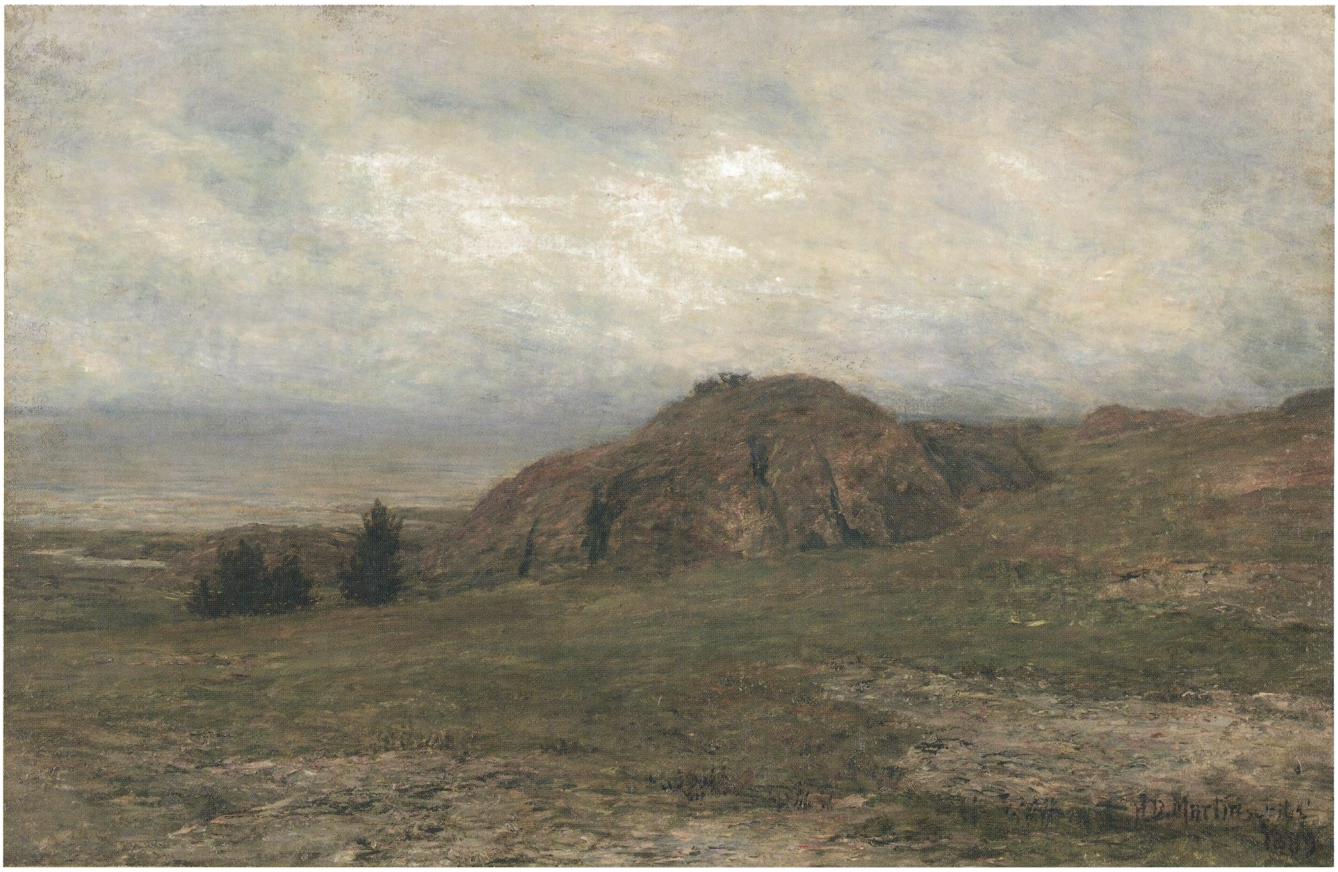


Fig. 2.24. Homer Dodge Martin, *Wild Coast Newport*, c. 1885–95. Oil on canvas, 23.2 x 36 in. Cleveland Museum of Art.

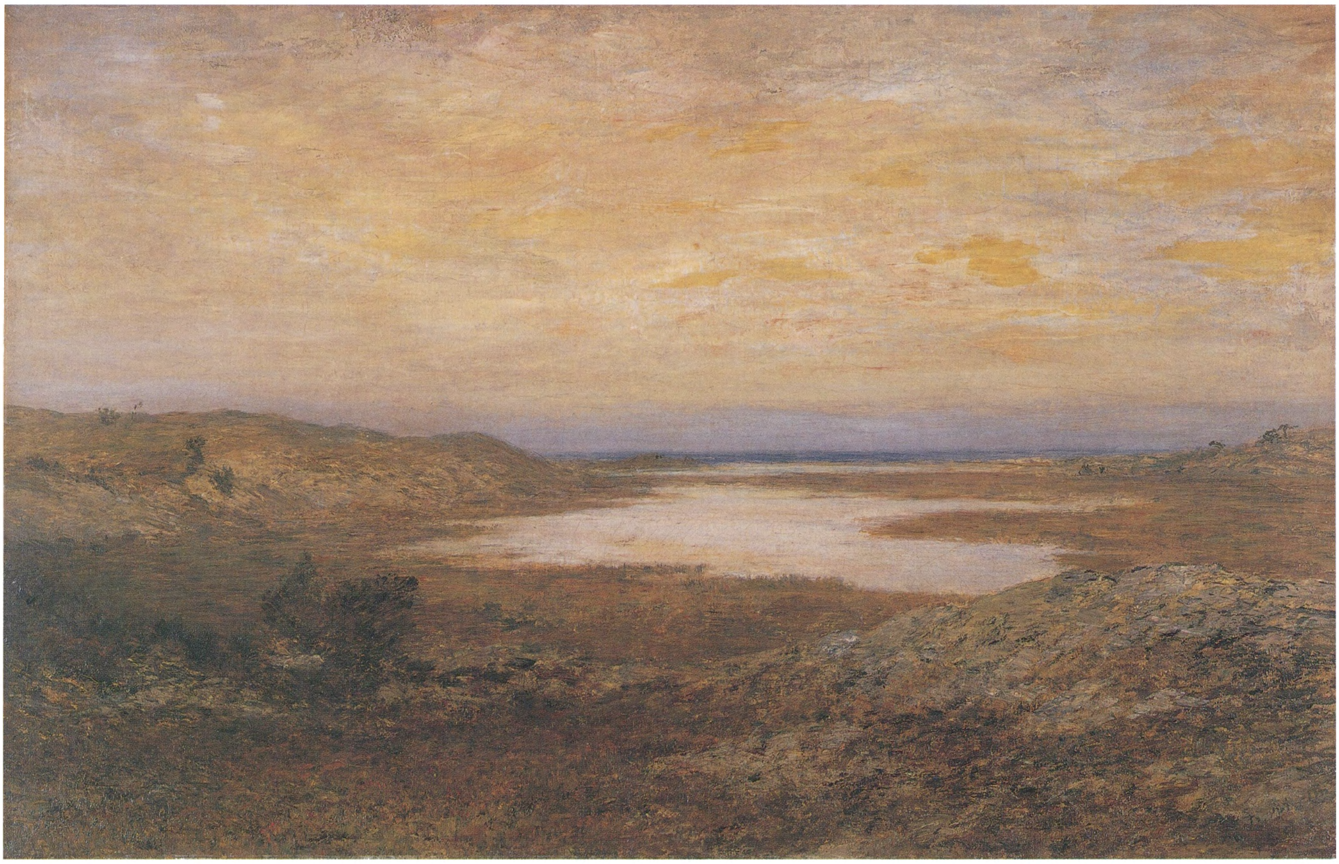


Fig. 2.25. Homer Dodge Martin, *Newport Neck*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 29 x 45 in. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, memorial gift from Dr. T. Edward and Tulah Hanley, Bradford, Pennsylvania.

nature as it settled, Martin and Thoreau confronted the pitiless otherness of nature and appropriated some vital part of it for their work. Martin was a child of nature—mystic, independent, and rebellious. What Emerson said of Thoreau holds, too, for Martin: "His [Thoreau's] power of observation seemed to indicate additional senses. . . . And yet none knew better than he that it is not the fact that imports, but the impression or effect of the fact on your mind. Every fact lay in glory in his mind, a type of the order and beauty of the whole."[76] Much of Martin's legacy of raw natural abstraction has made its way by circuitous paths into the work of Marsden Hartley and John Marin.

Westchester Hills, circa 1890 (fig. 2.26), shows how even nearer to home, Martin could still plumb the feeling of abandonment and nostalgia the old farmlands of the East Coast produced in the minds of his contemporaries. The historian Charles Caffin wrote that *Westchester Hills* was Martin's finest work and the only one that he began and finished in the open air.[77] This spare-dun-hued landscape passed in and out of the hands of the greatest Tonalist collector of the day, William Evans, and was exhibited to great acclaim at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. The bleak hills, again under skies reminiscent of Normandy, speak to another facet of Martin's engagement with his native ground. Unlike Inness, who preferred his scenes of rural life to invoke the living—or possibly their Swedenborgian counterparts—Martin's pastures are long deserted and few if any figures find their way into his late elegiac landscapes. He shied away from anything intimating a literary or anecdotal association, much less a descriptive title. And yet in a discussion among his cronies about story-telling pictures, he freely admitted that even in his pure landscapes anecdotal themes could hardly be avoided. Of *Westchester Hills*, he admitted, "Oh, the old home has been deserted, and all the family has gone West along that road."[78] Martin and his generation, and the younger generation to come, were acutely aware of the general abandonment of much of the farmland along the eastern seaboard. From the outskirts of New York north to Maine, artists and their patrons were taking refuge from urban life in vacation homes, buying up, often for a song, the ramshackle farmhouses of the former inhabitants. The tumbled stone walls and overgrown pastures glimpsed in *Westchester Hills* are a paean to a fading bucolic world. Thoreau, too, pondered the ruined cellar holes and wild lilac bushes that had once fronted the entrances to long-abandoned farms in Concord.

In June 1893, Martin gave up his New York studio and joined his wife and grown son in St. Paul, Minnesota. There, in a small studio, with his eyesight failing, he finished some of his greatest paintings (see fig. 1.11, *South Side Long Island*). An oculist diagnosed a severed optic nerve in one eye and a cataract in the other. To his wife he exclaimed after finishing his last picture, "I have learned to paint at last. If I were quite blind now, and knew just where the colors were on my palette, I could express myself."[79] A tiny gem of quiet introspection survives from these last years, *Silence of the Brooks*, circa 1893 (fig. 2.27), which seems a poignant and delicate coda to a larger-than-life personality. One wonders if this was some stopping place near the artist's home in his final years in St. Paul. The small scale, limited tonal range, and focus on nature's most intimate wonders—stark leaf-shorn bushes against the dusk—not only

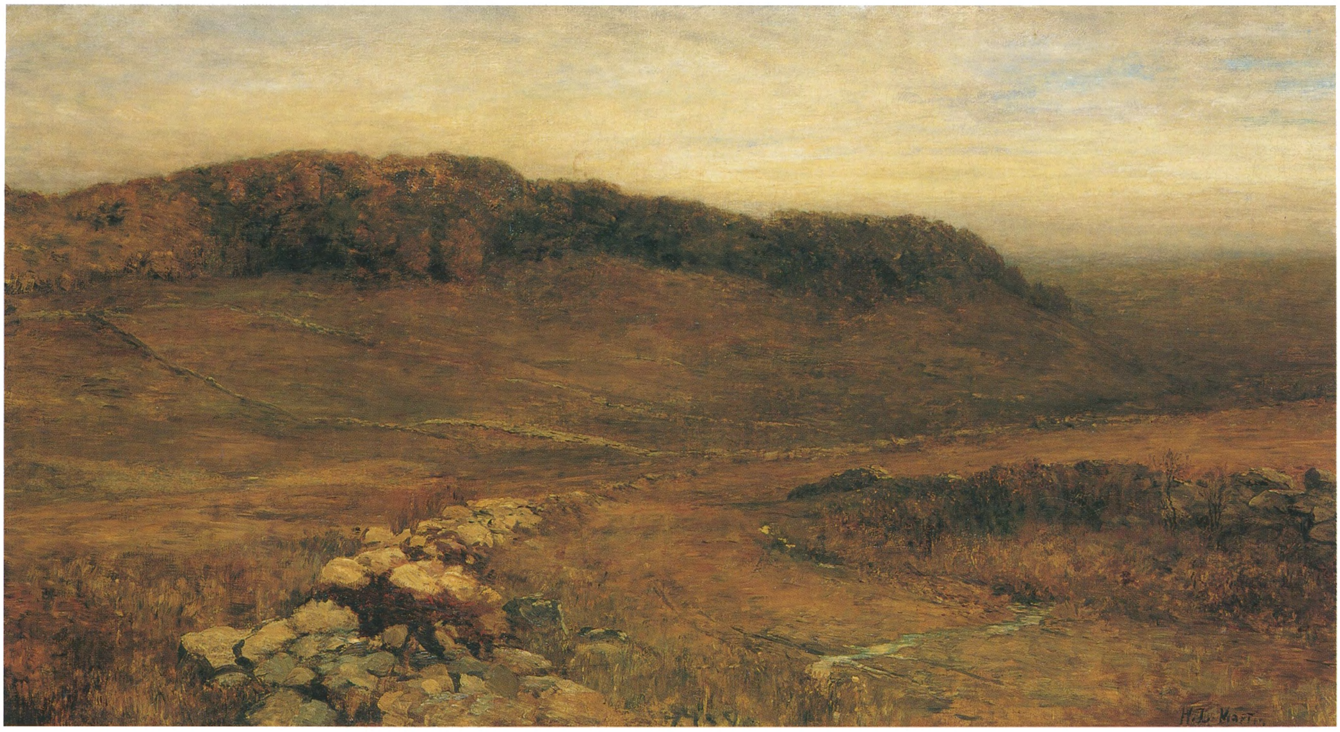


Fig. 2.26. Homer Dodge Martin, *Westchester Hills*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 33½ x 60¼ in. Collection of Dr. John E. and Colles B. Larkin.

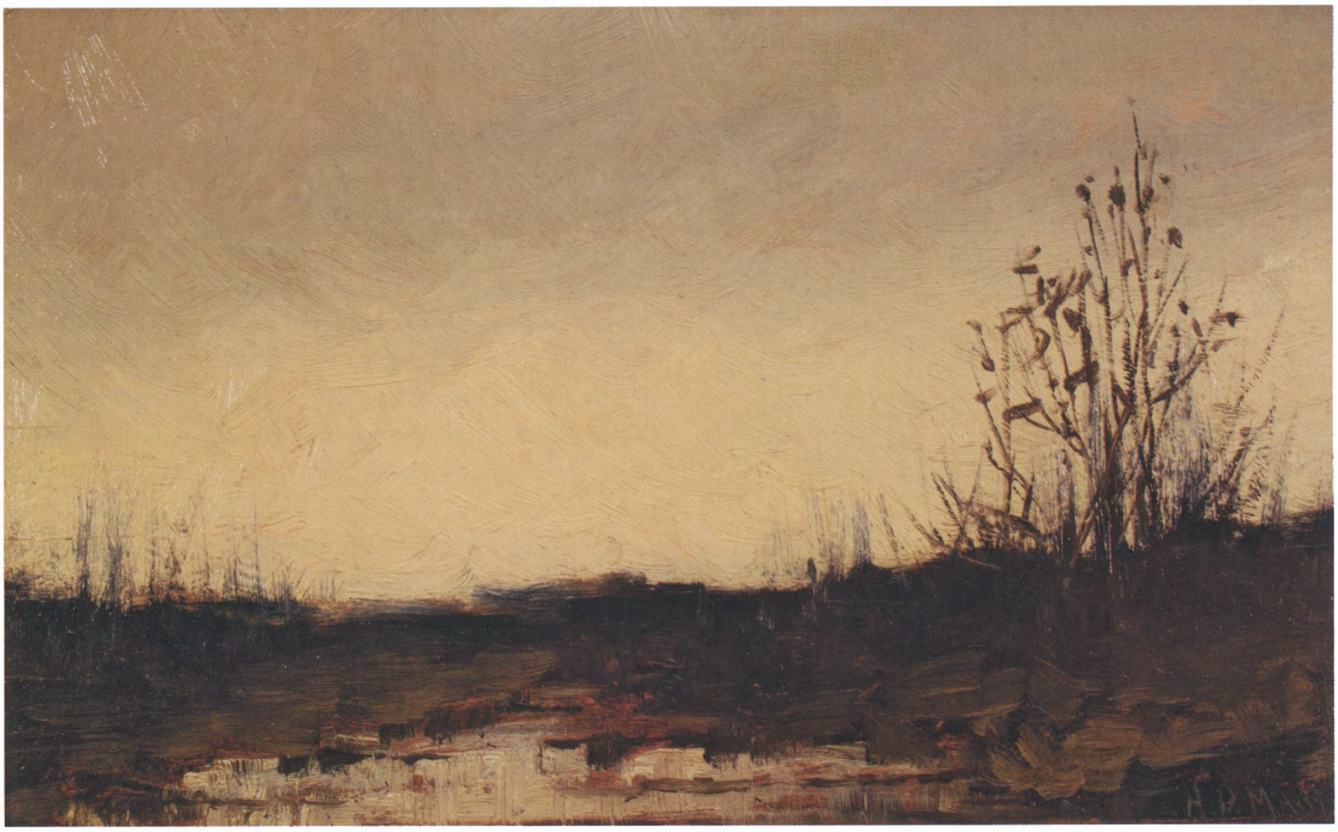


Fig. 2.27. Homer Dodge Martin, *Silence of the Brooks*, c. 1893. Oil on panel, 7 x 11 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

fits with the prevailing often melancholy mood of the Tonalist movement of the 1890s, but offers an insight into the artist's most cherished truths. With minimal strokes of his brush and a few limited tones, Martin has created a spare yet tender image of the inner life. One is reminded again of Thoreau who wrote, "This earth which is spread out like a map around me is but the lining of my inmost soul exposed. . . . It matters not where or how far you travel—the farther commonly the worse—but how much alive you are . . . All that a man has to say or do that can possibly concern mankind, is in some shape or other to tell the story of his love—to sing, and, if he is fortunate and keeps alive, he will be forever in love."[80] Nearly blind, financially broken, his throat eaten away by cancer, Martin died in near obscurity in 1897. Within a few years, canvases he had been unable to sell in his lifetime—or only for a pittance—began selling for thousands of dollars, many going to the major collectors and museums of the day. Within five years of his death, he was lionized as one of the greatest landscape painters yet produced in America.

Alexander Wyant (1836–92)

Of the three major first-generation transitional figures—George Inness, Homer Dodge Martin, and Alexander Wyant—it is Wyant who can be characterized as the most meditative and introverted, the more narrowly focused in style and subject matter. What Wyant lacks in breadth and power, compared to Inness and Martin, he gains in depth; he is drawn to the intimate moment, to dappled clearings on the edge of the wilderness, often at dusk—places saturated with silvery, fugitive light. While seemingly tame—Wyant is ever the poet of silence and deep introspection—the artist's late work moves to a level of conceptual abstraction and spiritual embodiment as profound as either Inness or Martin.

Alexander Wyant (fig. 2.28) was born in 1836 on what was then the American frontier at Evans Creek, Tuscarawas County, Ohio; he lacked the early instruction and exposure to art from which Inness and Martin had benefited—and he knew it. His early career seemed plagued by false starts. As a young man he had sketched nature and done some sign painting. In 1857, at age twenty-one, he was impressed by an exhibition of Inness paintings that he saw in Cincinnati and in 1858 sought out the artist in New York. With Inness's encouragement, Wyant, then working in a classic Hudson River mode, moved to New York in 1863. Inness was living in Medfield, Massachusetts, and Wyant may have been unfamiliar with Inness's developing post-Barbizon style, or even good examples of French paintings, at that time more visible in Boston than New York. Under sway of the prevailing Hudson River School in New York and aware that many of its practitioners had studied in Germany, Wyant went to study art in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1865. He found the strict, meticulous training there unsatisfactory and so he left early for England where he visited the galleries and was

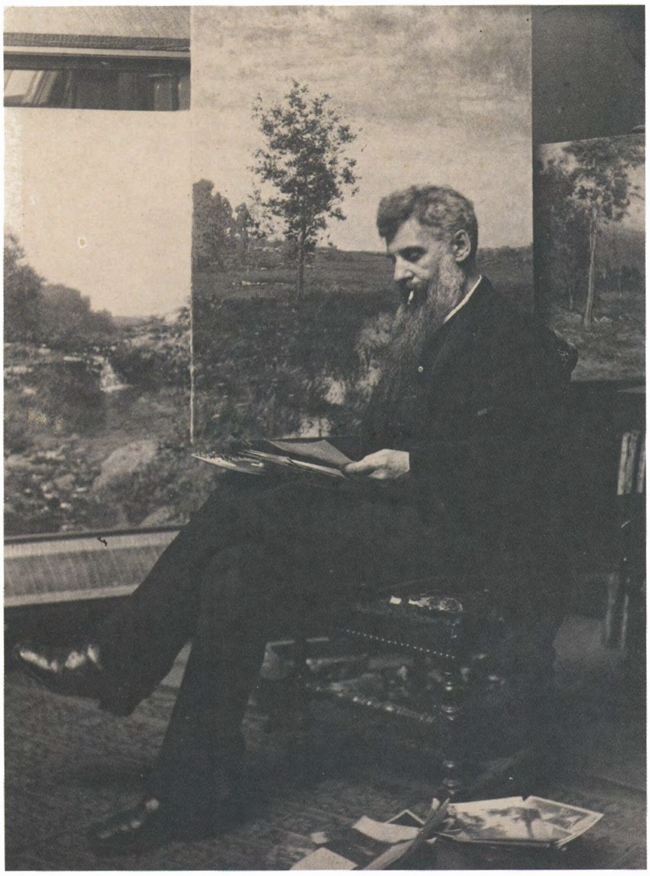


Fig. 2.28. Alexander Wyant, photographed c. 1882. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

greatly impressed by the work of Constable. As was the case for Inness and Martin, the atmospheric effects and pastoral feeling of Constable probably had a greater impact on Wyant's later Tonalist style than French Barbizon sources. But it may be that a sojourn in Ireland that lasted for the better part of 1866 also played a pivotal role in his adoption of a broader Tonalist feel for space. His *View in County Kerry, Ireland* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art) carries a date of 1866. This date has proved problematic for scholars since the feeling for soft and broad atmospheric effects constitutes an abrupt break with Wyant's tighter Hudson River School style—a style the artist continued to use well after 1866. The painting embodies the quintessential elements of Wyant's transition to a Tonalist style, maintaining the wide panoramic view characteristic of the Hudson River School artists, yet achieving intimacy through its emphasis on pellucid atmosphere and a spare and broad rendering of detail. Another, similar work by Wyant, *Irish Landscape*, dated 1865 (fig. 2.29), seems to confirm the artist's early appreciation of Constable's mastery of pearly gray tones and heavy moisture-laden air, the very sort of microclimate he was exposed to during the months of his stay in Ireland. *Irish Landscape*, though tighter in handling and detail than the classic Tonalist landscape of the 1880s, displays Wyant's precocious skills for—and adaptability to—working successfully in a tonal mode. Only Inness and La Farge were pursuing similar innovations at this time. Wyant was not the first and certainly not the last American painter whose exposure to misty European skies

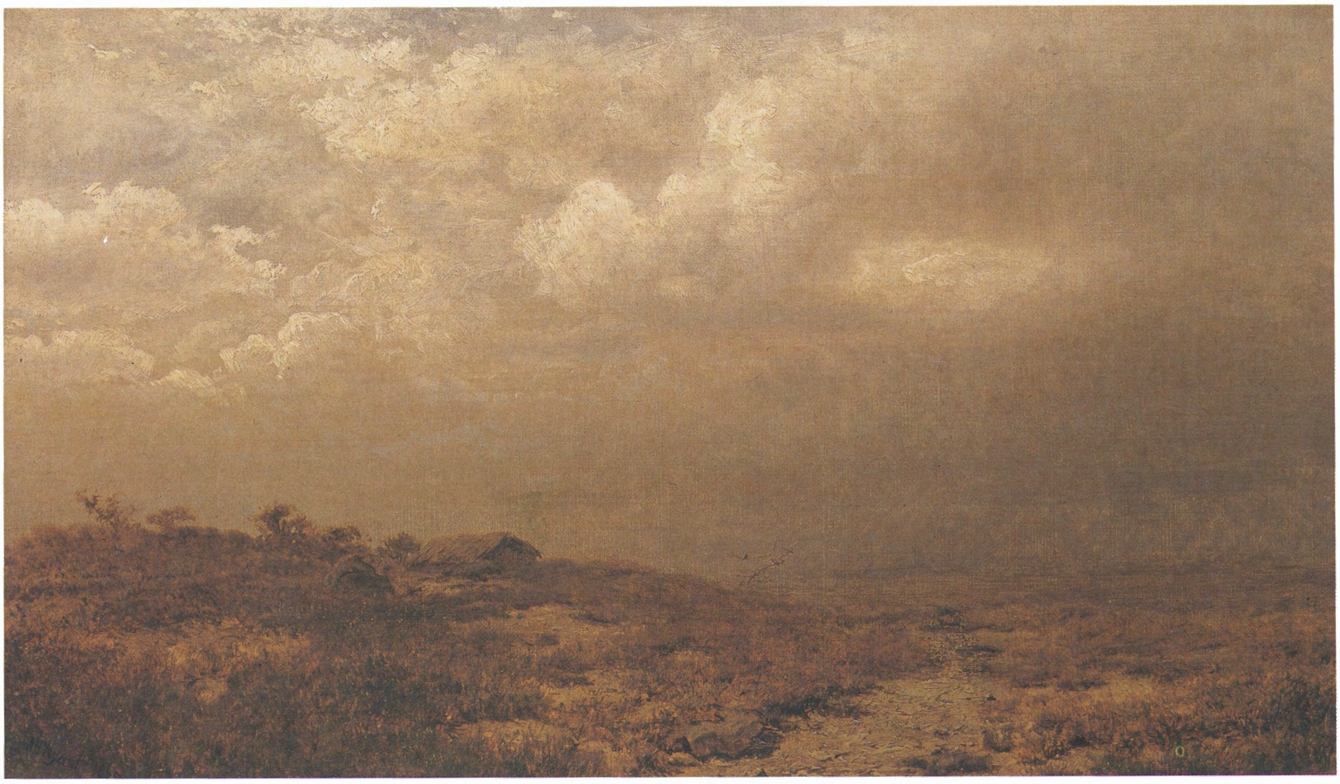


Fig. 2.29. Alexander Wyant, *Irish Landscape*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 12 x 20 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

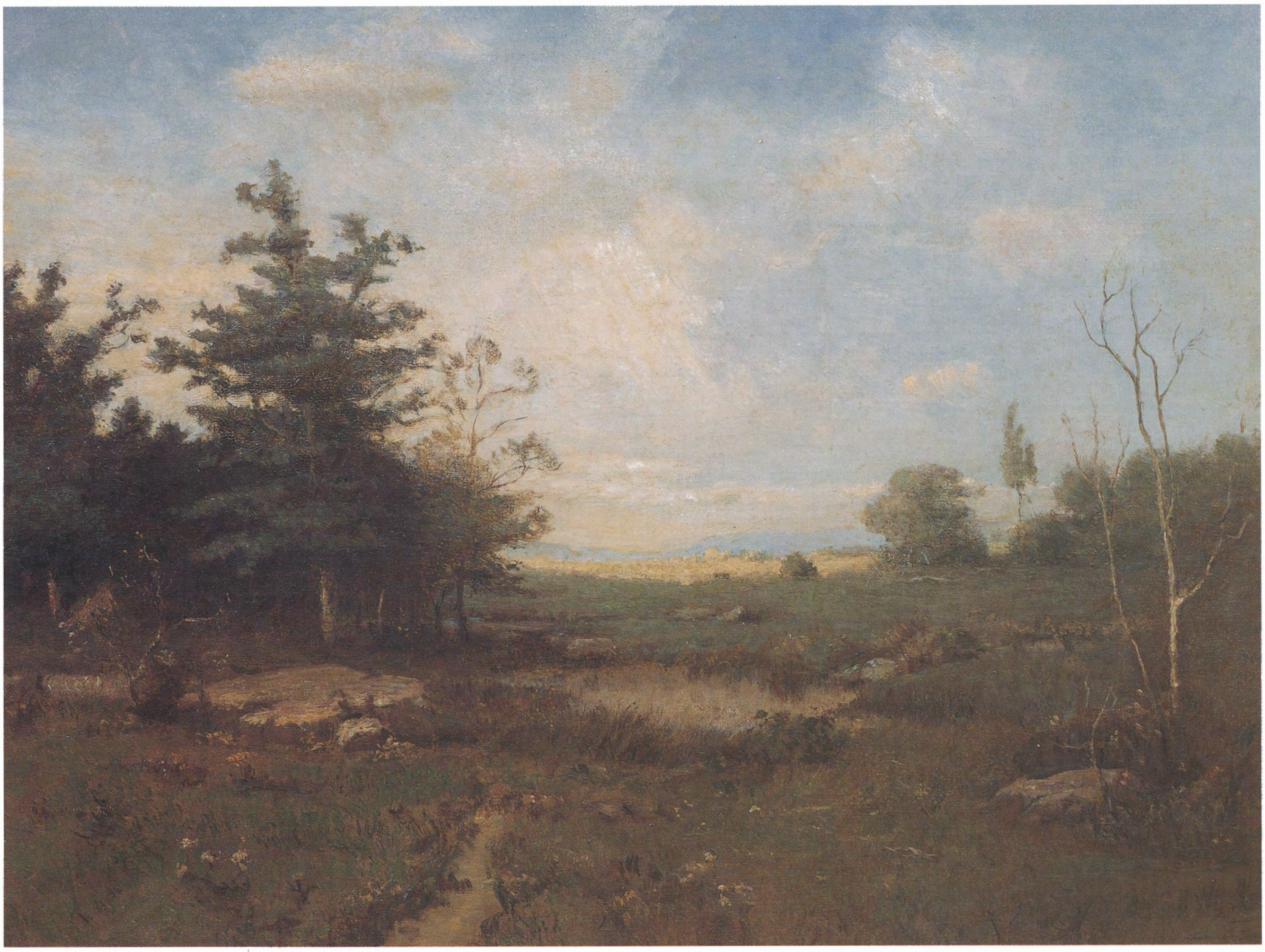


Fig. 2.30. Alexander Wyant, *Pool on the Ausable*, 1871. Oil on canvas, 17 x 25½ in. Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

resulted in a fundamental change in his palette. Returning to America, confronted with brighter, more sun-filled American climes, these expatriates readily adapted the pearly gray tones of European light to home ground by concentrating on times of cloudy weather and muted light, at dawn or dusk, or in the autumn and winter months. A letter from Wyant to his father in 1866 notes the artist's growing acuity of focus: "Everything I learn opens my eyes to dozens of things which I had not before thought of. It is much like walking through a thick wood occasionally getting a glimpse of a beautiful opening beyond. The nearer you approach it the more beautiful vistas reveal themselves to you, until at last you may stand upon the border."[81] This sense of spiritualizing wonder would suffuse Wyant's art in the following decades.

Wyant returned to New York in 1866 and settled there, gradually moving toward a looser, more fluid, and painterly style, which *Irish Landscape* certainly anticipated. Unlike Inness who caused stormy reactions among the critics, Wyant seems to have made a smoother transition into the Tonalist mode as he gradually explored his more expressive style, retaining the formulas of the Hudson River School, while moving to versions of the civilized landscape along the lines of Inness in his Medfield years. Wyant became a full academician at the National Academy of Design in 1869 (a year later than Inness); his finesse and talent for small-scale poetic landscapes in a relatively conservative manner were acceptable to the powers-that-be, inured to the prevailing Hudson River mode. Wyant's early membership in the American Society of Painters in Water Color in 1867 is another indication of his attraction to a more intimate vision of landscape. Wyant's health was never good and in an attempt to build himself up physically, and perhaps see some of the western country that had provided subject matter and good sales for the Hudson River artists like Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Moran, the artist joined a government expedition to explore the lands of Arizona and New Mexico in 1873. The harsh of traveling conditions resulted in a physical breakdown and heart attack that left him partially paralyzed for the rest of his life. Upon his return to New York, he was forced to learn to paint with his left hand.

It was long considered that Wyant's post–Hudson River style of looser, intimate Tonalism dated from 1873 when Wyant began painting with his left hand—a case of making a virtue out of a necessity. But the genesis of his conversion goes back at least to 1865 and during the intervening years when he would have become acquainted with Inness's innovations along similar lines. John La Farge, too, would have provided encouragement; his charming Newport landscapes may well have prompted Wyant to proceed in a similar vein. Wyant's biographer, Eliot Clark, noted that a number of the artist's pre-1873 naturalistic landscapes were executed with his right hand, further confirming the longer gestation period for Wyant's tonal poetry. *Pool on the Ausable*, 1871 (fig. 2.30), demonstrates Wyant's early 1870s transition from Hudson River School formulas to the more compact focused imagery of the Tonalist style. Something of the older panoramic vistas is retained, harking back to an earlier wildness, and there is more detail and less simplification of focus than would come in his later works. But this Adirondack clearing is imbued with palpable atmosphere, a visible nostalgic metaphor, touching on the fugitive lives of the early inhabitants who once worked the land. The pictorial emphasis is on the fore- and middle grounds where a pool reflects and refracts the fading light of day, and so fills the clearing with exquisite softened colors, with just enough detail in the flowers, rocks, and tree branches to add contrast and interest to the general harmonious effect. Another painting from this period, *Mountain Tarn*, circa 1872–75 (fig. 2.31), though less intimate in focus, fully displays Wyant's feel for palpable atmospheric effects and glorious, if subdued, cloud forms at dusk.

The effect of Wyant's paralysis, the switch to the left hand, and his slowly declining health probably reinforced the direction of Wyant's art, and certainly prompted the adoption of smaller, more manageable canvases, and a mood of somberness and introspection in the face of the ebbing of the artist's powers. That Wyant was firmly in the forefront of the advanced painters of the day is indicated by his invitation to join the early membership of the Society of American Artists in 1878, where he was recognized as an indigenous champion of the American landscape, akin to Inness and Martin. An extraordinary work of expressive bravura is *Any Man's Land*, circa 1880 (fig. 2.32), which was first exhibited at the Society of American Artists in 1880, catching the eye of Charles de Kay, who saw in Wyant's growth as an artist signs that the society was encouraging progressive tendencies in its members. "This pleasing landscape painter (or rather painter of skies, for he shows more skill in the management of clouds than the painting of terrestrial distances,) has at No. 76, a view called 'Any Man's Land,' which is skillful as well as bold in its treatment of masses of cloud. Mr. Wyant has been losing of late years his overmuch sweetness and weakness, and is a standing evidence of the value to Academicians of a little society like this, since it acts on all who are able to be acted upon as a stimulus to exertion in new directions."[82] As the title suggests, this is a country on the edge of civilization, not yet tamed, or perhaps once tamed and slipping back into the wild, abandoned by the early settlers for better lands in the West. But the narrative exists solely in

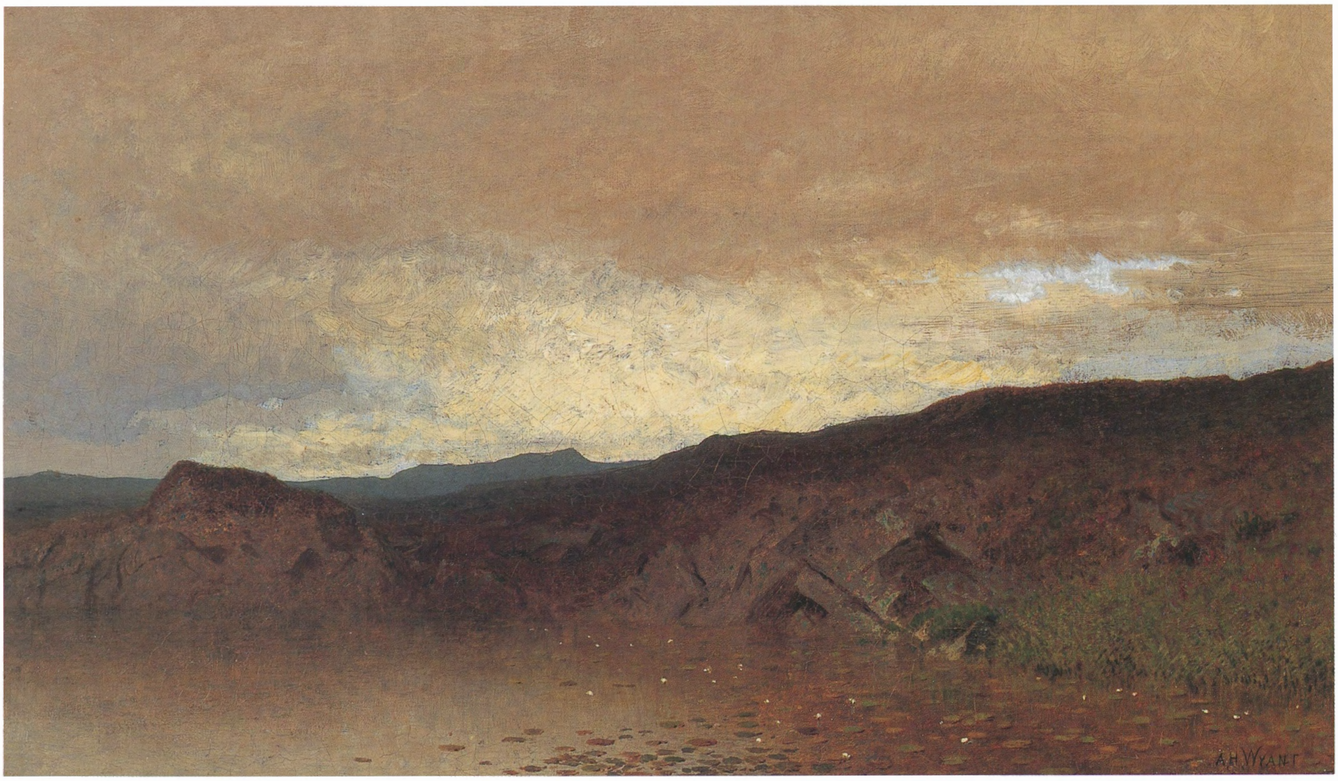


Fig. 2.31. Alexander Wyant, *Mountain Tarn*, c. 1872–75. Oil on canvas, 9 x 15 in. Anonymous collection.

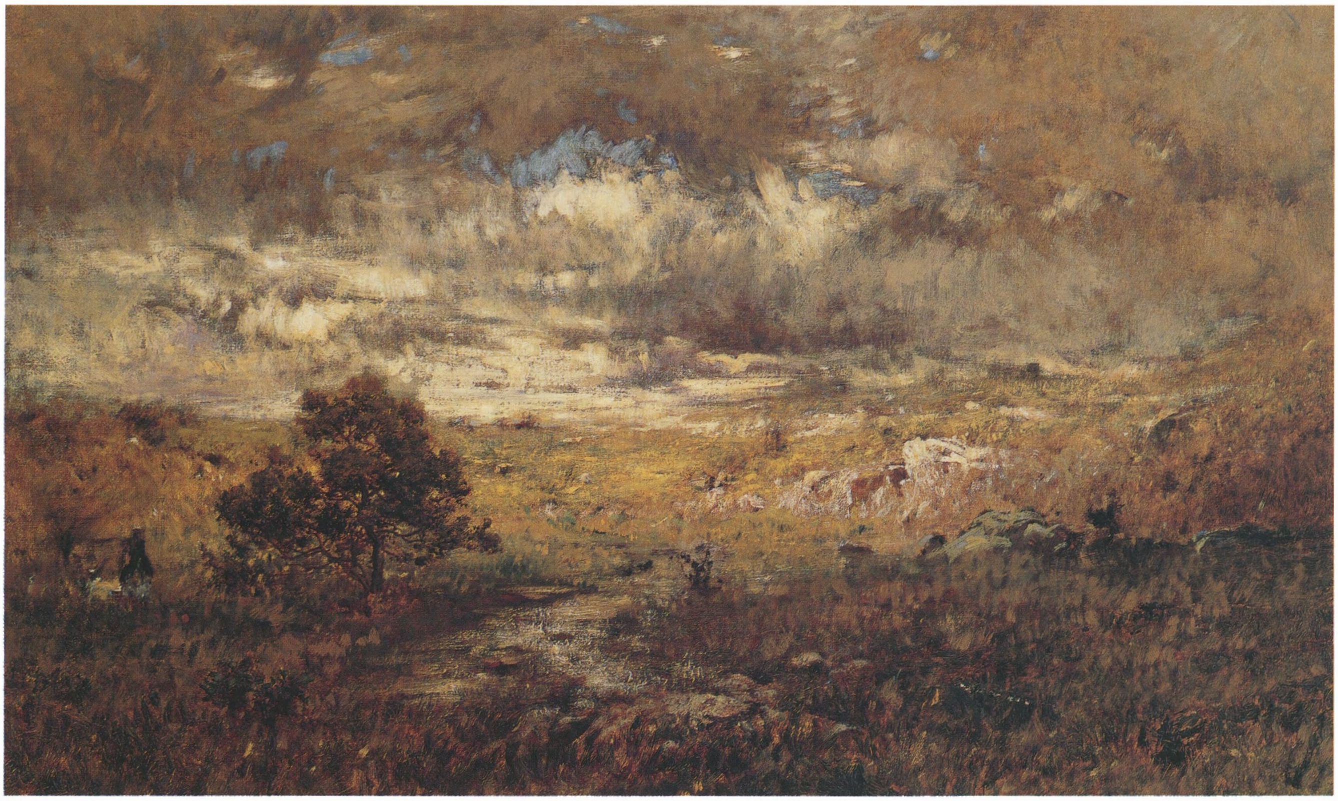


Fig. 2.32. Alexander Wyant, *Any Man's Land*, c. 1880. Oil on canvas, 18½ x 30½ in. Los Angles County Museum of Art. Purchased with Funds provided by Mr. and Mrs. Willard G. Clark, Mr. James B. Pick, and Coe Kerr Gallery.

the fantastic exuberance of the paint handling, what the early-twentieth-century art writer Eliot Clark called "the unrelenting and irresistible force of nature," terming the landscape, "one of the most dramatic and powerful pictures painted by Wyant." The sheer energy of the overlapping and crashing waves of pigment seems out of character for what might be expected from a reticent and sickly man weakened by a stroke. All the fundamentals of landscape are in place but the scene is an excuse for raw emotion, with the suggestion of states of mind expressed in pigment dashed, smeared, and scumbled over the canvas—the urgency of nature captured in the crosscurrents of color shaped into jostling forms. Only Inness among the indigenous landscapists was painting with such expressive conviction at this time, and it may well be that the Munich-based J. Frank Currier, whose exuberant landscape watercolors had first been exhibited in New York in 1878, was the source of Wyant's sudden leap to such vigorous and forceful depiction, anticipating by almost ten years his late expressionistic work and that of his friend Inness. Almost a quarter of a century later, Charles de Kay would crow again about *Any Man's Land* when it was exhibited at the gallery of William Clausen in New York, noting how it "holds the attention through the masterly rendering of rain clouds, which roll along the horizon and extend over a moorland, seeming to drop with rain. This picture harks back to the early days of the Society of American Artists, where it made its first appearance a quarter of a century ago. Bought for $500 or $600 by a dealer, its next buyer has to pay thrice the original price, and if it changed hands now the figure would be five times what the dealer gave."[83] *Any Man's Land* is another example, like Wyant's early Tonalist landscapes of Ireland, of a precocious artist who nurtured the seeds of his later advances long before others recognized them.

What de Kay had described as Wyant's "masterly rendering of rain clouds" was reprised in 1881 with *Avalanche Lake (Adirondacks)* (fig. 2.33), an extraordinary tour de force of precise renderings of natural phenomena, but supercharged with a dark brooding energy in the impinging rain clouds gathering force on the near horizon. The work displays a talent for pictorial compression: the near and far, foreground boulders and distant sky, teeter into the viewer's space with an almost claustrophobic effect in another example of Wyant's facility for combining Hudson River modes with a Tonalist's feel for emotive lighting and expressive paint handling.

Like all artists, especially in the tough art market of the 1880s, Wyant had to make concessions to taste, and as the demand for Hudson River–style landscapes waned, he exploited the growing audience for his small lyrical landscapes, full of subtle colors and delicate glazing, which portrayed scenes in the Lake Champlain–Adirondacks area, and later in the Catskills near Arkville, where he and his wife bought a house in 1889. But if and when he became stuck in a rut of sweetness or harked back to Hudson River convention, Charles de Kay was always

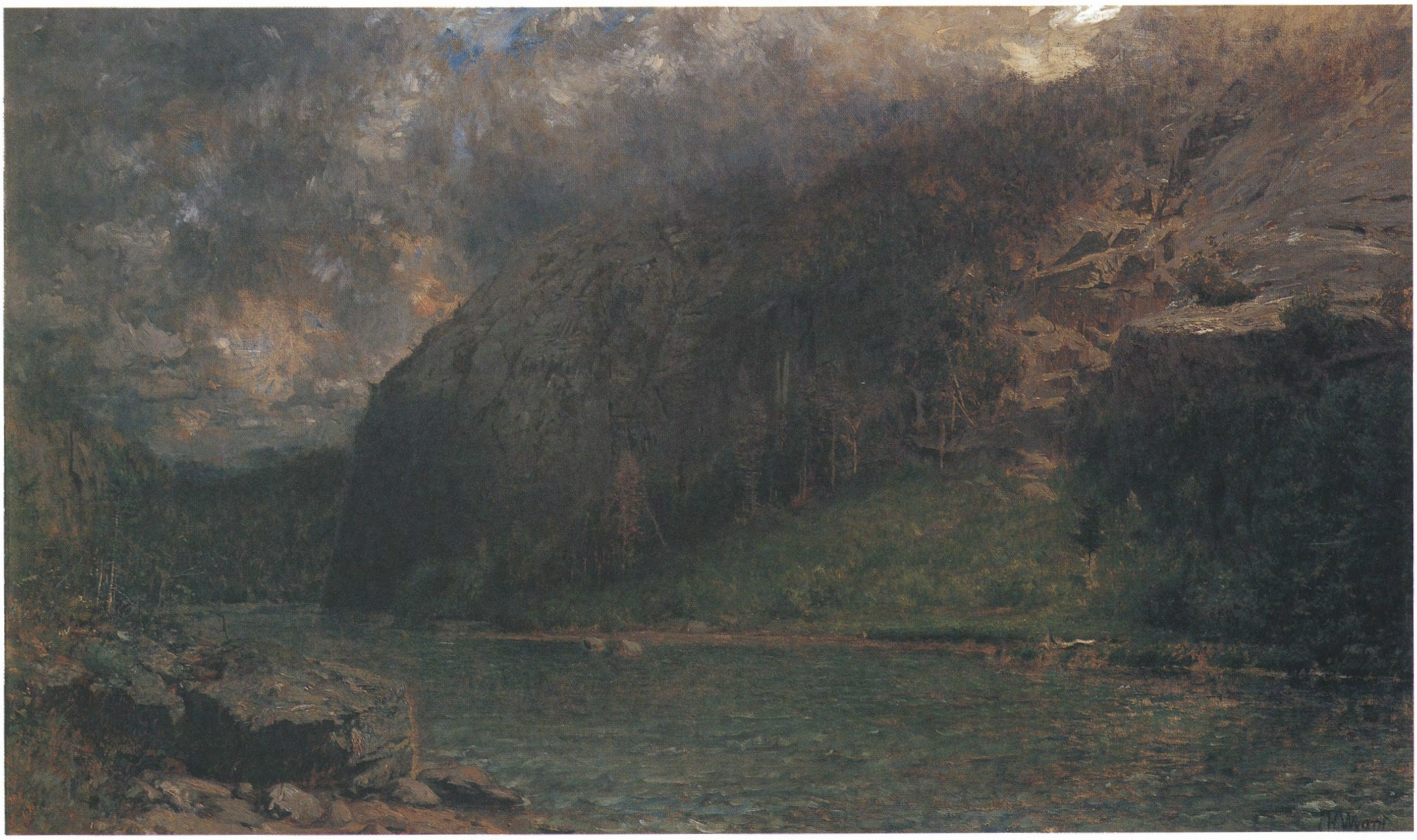


Fig. 2.33. Alexander Wyant, *Avalanche Lake (Adirondacks)*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 36 x 60 in. Collection of Anthony E. Battelle, Brookline, MA.

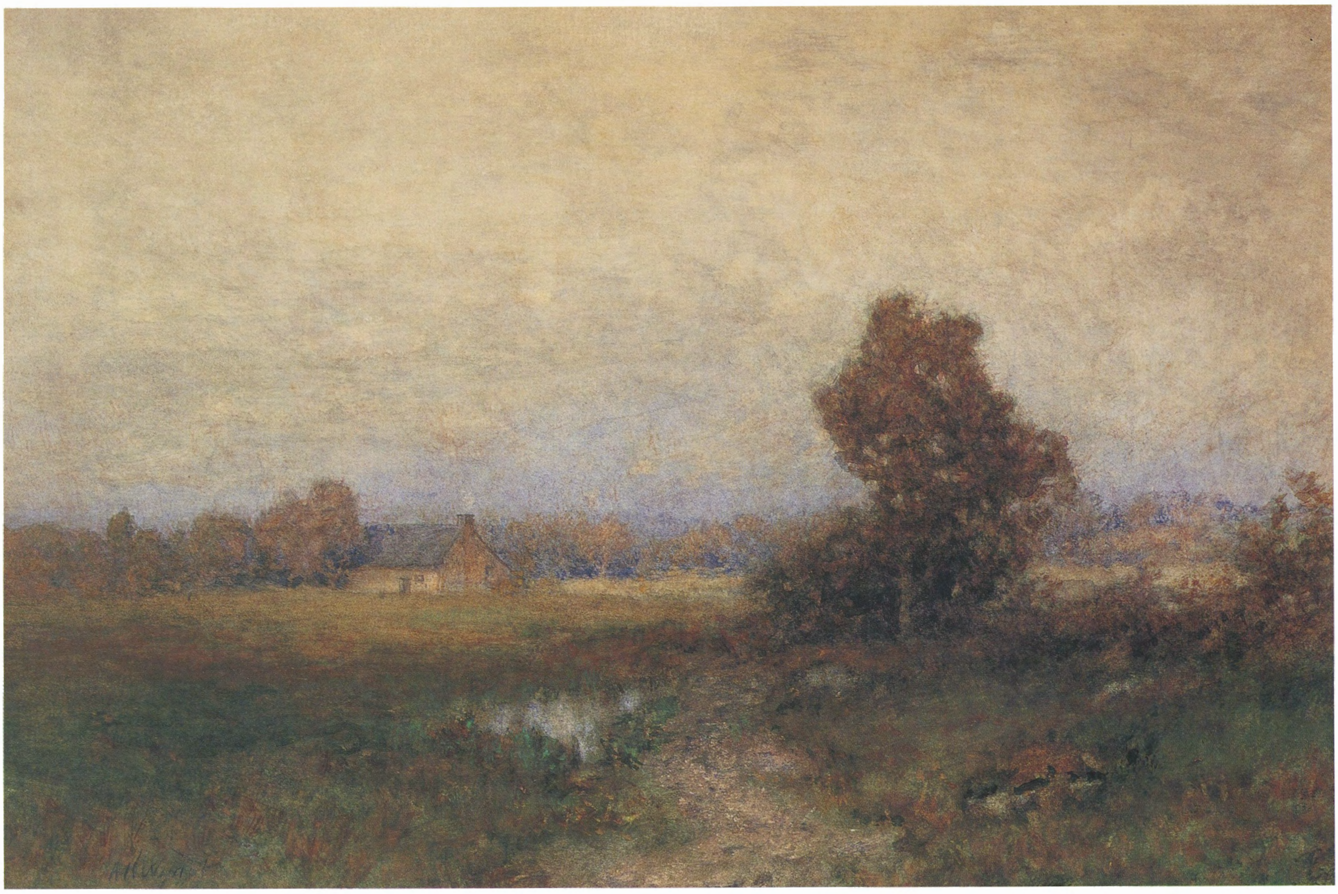


Fig. 2.34. Alexander Wyant, *Farm House*, c. 1880–90. Watercolor, 15 x 21 in. Anonymous collection.

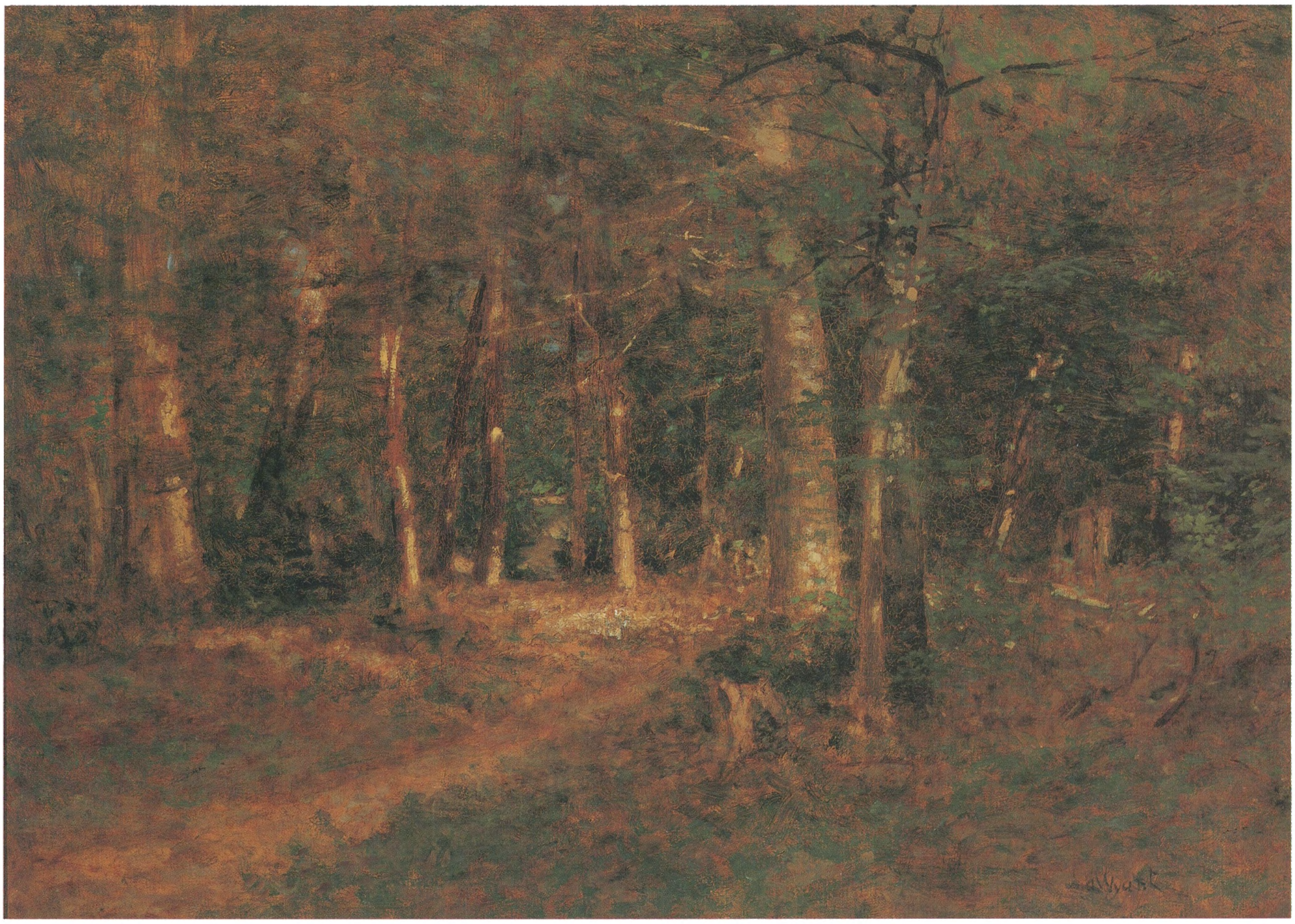


Fig. 2.35. Alexander Wyant, *In the Adirondacks (Woodland Scene)*, c. 1885–90. Oil on canvas, 17¾ x 25½ in. Anonymous collection.

ready with a harsh reminder. In 1881 the critic made a visit to Wyant's studio, noting his subtle small-scale scenes, many in watercolor ("Are not watercolors, after all, the true sphere for Mr. Wyant?"), which constituted the artist's signature style by the 1880s. Of an intimate scene along the lines of the watercolor *Farm House*, circa 1880–90 (fig. 2.34), he wrote: "There is a very delightful little oil-painting on his wall, however, which shows a gray, cloudy sky, a dark ground, and a white horizon. What relieves it from all the rest is its simplicity; for, if it be not too reckless for a layman to advance an opinion of the kind, Mr. Wyant seems to err most in cutting up his landscape. He includes too many things, and the consequence is that much of the charm of sentiment goes for nothing, because one is worried by the multiplicity of small objects. In color, as well as form, he needs more simplicity and breadth. Yet his studio was certainly one of those in the building which best repaid a visit. One feels the artist is alive, changeable, willing to vary his methods if a change finally seems to him needful."[84] De Kay had already chastised Wyant for his occasional pettiness and too-busy landscapes in his April review of the National Academy of Design exhibition that same year—the lingering foibles of the Hudson River School.[85] He went on in the article to dismiss the Hudson River School artist Jasper Cropsey, who had a studio nearby, comparing the artist's fall tints to "the Englishman's somewhat barbaric taste for red, whether in his flag, his soldier's coat, the 'pink' of his fox-hunters, or the scarlet liveries of his flunkies." De Kay (whose ardent patriotism for American art would only grow with the years), a fervent supporter of Albert Pinkham Ryder, Inness, and the Tonalist movement, clearly was encouraging Wyant to hasten along the path on which he had already embarked, to refine and simplify in order to achieve the overall impact of a general sentiment, as opposed to a multiplicity of visual assignments found in a typical Hudson River view. Similar promptings for simplicity and breadth of feeling by de Kay and other critics, who despised the Hudson River School, would fill the art press in the coming decade, thus challenging and pressuring artists, young and old, to adopt the progressive tenets of the Tonalist movement.

Wyant spent his remaining years touching on his early Hudson River School locales in the Catskills and Adirondacks, as if needing to refresh himself with their wild spirit. Many of the works from this period are vertical compositions of woodland interiors with the dappled light and shade reminiscent of Narcisse Diaz. Often a silvery vista is glimpsed beyond the sheltering boughs, or a glimmering pond gives off an aqueous glazing of immaterial tints. His horizontal landscapes, such as

In the Adirondacks (Woodland Scene), circa 1885–90 (fig. 2.35), depict areas on the edge of the wilderness, possibly abandoned farms and roads on their way to being reclaimed by the regrowth of forests in the Adirondacks and Catskills. In this, Wyant was much in sympathy with Thoreau's sense that in the West, daily illuminated by the setting sun, lay the heart of wildness and health. "The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild . . . that in Wildness is the preservation of the World. Every tree sends its fibres forth in search of the Wild. The cities import it at any price."[86] By the mid-1880s, Wyant was firmly in the Tonalist camp, painting with broadly brushed masses of cool greens and delicate earth tones—right out of Hunt's 1878 handbook *Talks on Art*. Occasionally his work, with its formulaic reflective pool of water and fleeting shadows, could harden into something of a cliché, and he rarely seemed to have grated on conservative tastes. Yet Wyant was often surprising, his delicacy and depth of vision producing poignant and stirring effects. While Martin spent much of the early 1880s in Normandy exile, often in desperate financial straits, Wyant, along with Inness and La Farge, managed a comfortable life as a New York clubman—the Century Club was his favored haunt—and he prospered as one of the leading lights of the Tonalist Movement.

A Wayside Pool, circa 1880s (fig. 2.36), is an example of the deceptive strength of Wyant's best work. Beneath the seeming tranquility of the scene, floating amidst the cool greens and glazed-down harmonies of tone, is fevered brushwork. Close examination finds an array of minutely and exuberantly executed brushstrokes, of wet-into-wet application, and jewel-like jottings of local color that demonstrate both spontaneity and clear-eyed calculation. There is just enough detail—and even the details are merely scribbles of paint—to anchor reality and allow the viewer a bravura display of varied textures and indistinct forms that appear and disappear when read close up and at a distance. Such ambiguity and the eliding of forms, one into another, gives a visual approximation of metamorphosis, an idea much on people's minds at the dawn of the Darwinian revolution. As Shakespeare often held back basic information on his characters' motivations, seemingly endowing them with fascinating and hidden depths, so Wyant and the Tonalists pared down detail in their landscapes—withholding visual data, the better to leave the viewer perplexed and musing upon the mysterious and hidden transformations on canvas. Wyant's silvery tones—executed by a man half-paralyzed and in pain—have a subtly and refinement that neither Inness nor Martin—who was half-blind by the late 1880s—could equal.

Sketch, Clearing Up, circa 1885–92 (fig. 2.37), demonstrates the artist's inimitable merging of the seemingly conventional with pyrotechnic brushwork and free expression, an inner exuberance with a visceral love of paint qua paint, and clouds

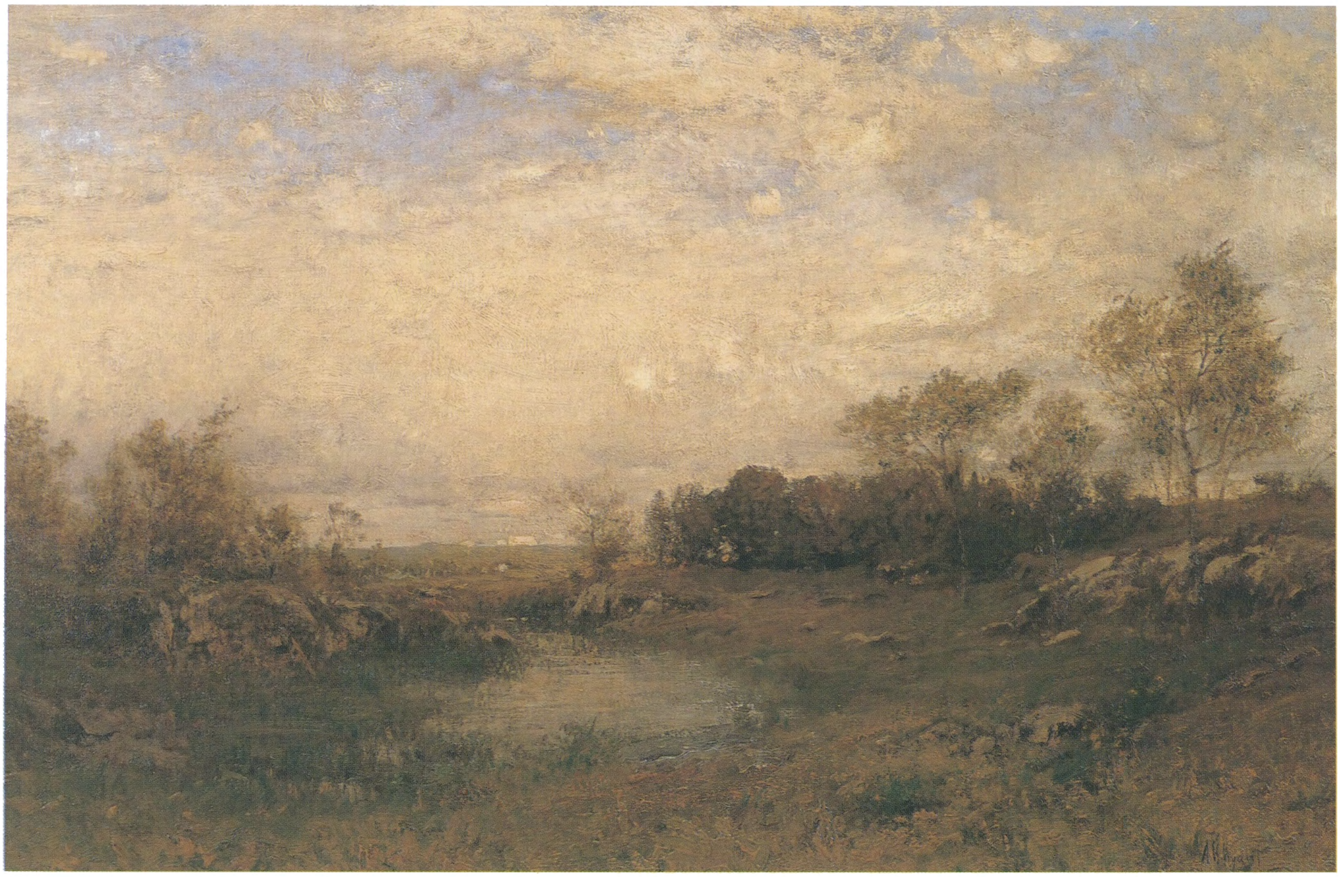


Fig. 2.36. Alexander Wyant, *A Wayside Pool*, c. 1880s. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

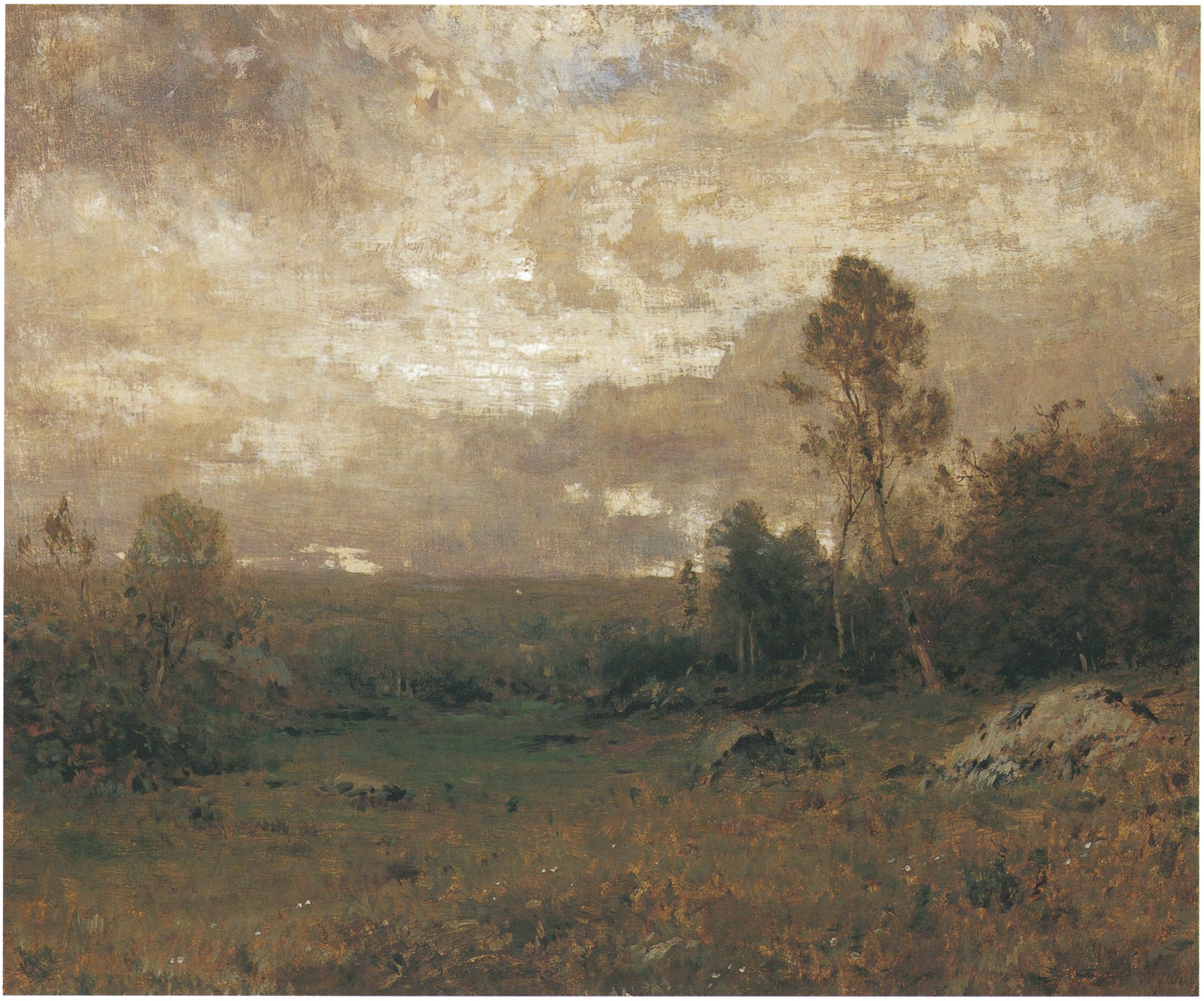


Fig. 2.37. Alexander Wyant, *Sketch, Clearing Up*, c. 1885–92. Oil on canvas, 14 x 17 in. Anonymous collection.

of slathered pigment that nearly billow off the canvas, another testament to Wyant's early love of Constable. Wyant may lack the stormy power, roiling spiritual highs, and contemplative lows of Inness, but there is a consistent and concentrated meditative profundity in his best works that offers inimitable pleasures in contrast to the sublime metaphysics of Inness. Wyant's is a lyric poetry, more akin to Wordsworth than to the brittle prose poetry of Thoreau—though Thoreau's wildness runs in his blood—or the high-flown Emerson. In 1907, historian Charles Caffin called Wyant's art single-hearted: "For their emotional quality increased until they became the intense expression of a mood—the artist's own feeling, interpreted through nature. And the mood grows to be one of absorbing love, and loveableness, frequent with sadness, musical lyrics in a minor key."[87]

In his last years, Wyant became a master of delicate summary effects that have a pronounced gestural quality. In *Green Hills*, circa 1890 (fig. 2.38), Wyant manages a degree of formal abstraction that is rarely found in Inness or Martin. The high horizon here is constructed with flat planes of summarily brushed greens and grays with little or no effort at realistic recession into space. The color lies flat on the canvas—mere patches of pigment with jottings for tree shapes. The narrow sky, too, is barely brushed in, the swirl of the stroke and the bare canvas beneath suggesting a painted equivalent of the energy propelling a darkening storm. The scene is both real and surreal. The forms of rocks and trees and ledges are arranged synthetically; they have the feel of natural symbolization induced by the jostling of layered memories: here, the emotional shorthand of an artist painting out of his soul as he is restricted more and more to the four walls of his studio. The tension between the two-dimensional read of the pigment and the mind's expectation of a third-dimensional recession only adds to the mysterious quality, a quality doubly reinforced by the tonal transitions, seamless yet jarring, echoing the textures of the natural world fading before the artist's eyes. Near the end

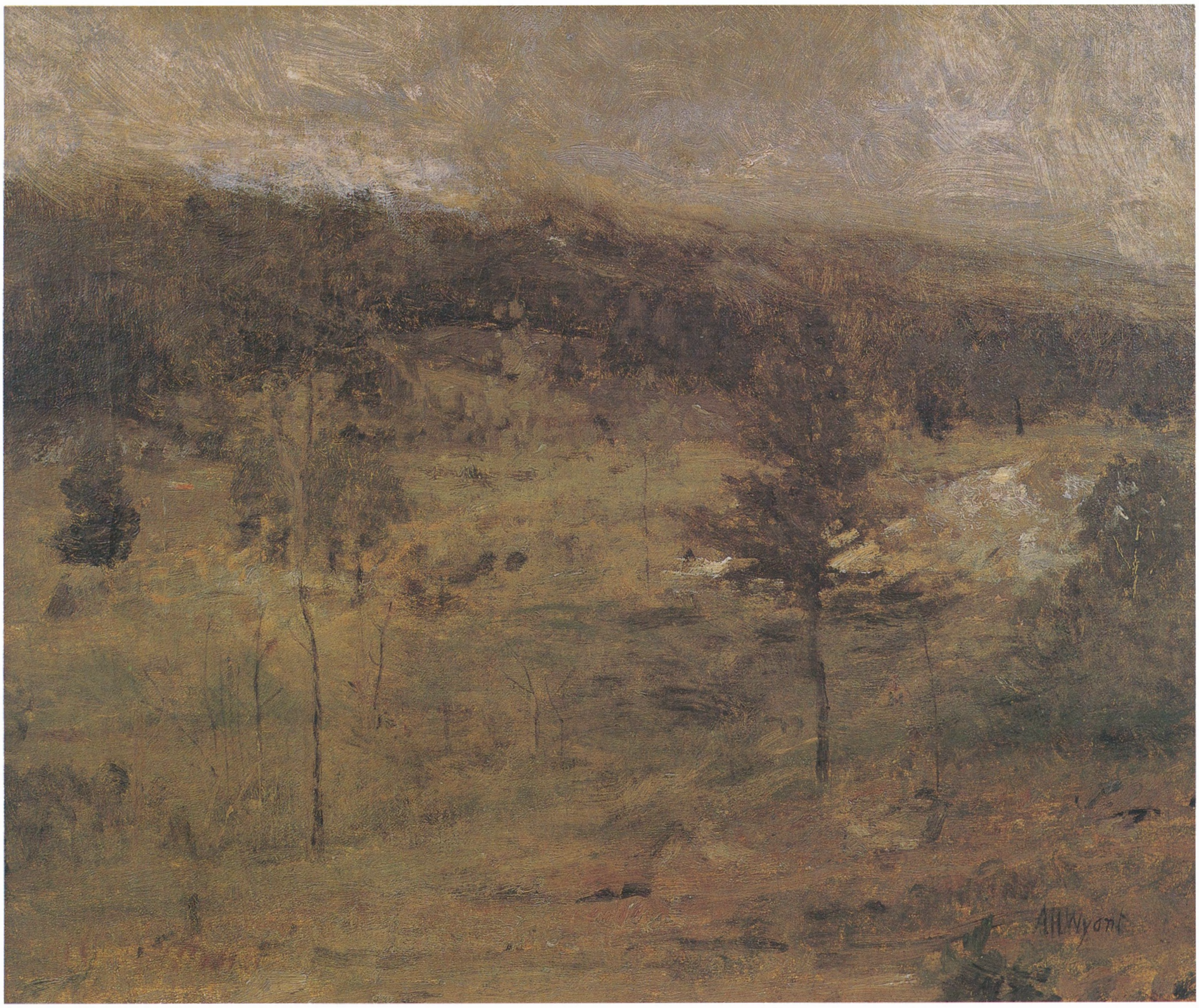


Fig. 2.38. Alexander Wyant, *Green Hills*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 12 x 14 in. Private collection.

of his life, Wyant was reported to have exclaimed, "Had I but five years more in which to paint, even one year, I think I could do the thing I yearn to do."[88]

In some respects, Inness and Martin may have been more revered by their contemporaries and followers—they were certainly stirring larger-than-life romantic personalities—but Wyant was loved. There was something deeply personal in his art, an art replete with very human vulnerabilities that struck a chord for many. Within ten years of his death in 1892, collectors furiously vied for his paintings. William Macbeth, his dealer, had a waiting list should any Wyants come on the market. By 1913, Wyants were selling for ten thousand dollars and up.

George Fuller (1822–84)

A final artist of the founding generation of Tonalists—is the odd and compelling figure of George Fuller (fig. 2.39). A born-and-bred New Englander, Fuller painted mysterious and haunting tonal portraits and landscapes that cast a compelling spell, first in New England and then in New York art circles in the late 1870s—and continued to do so long after his death. His work, often crude and uneven, was a bellwether for the kind of indigenous crepuscular imagery that is found in the work of Ryder, Blakelock, and in more refined versions, in that of Hunt, Martin, and Inness. Fuller was a kind of rural-backwater force of nature, at least to his contemporaries—an acquired taste that is hard to savor today. His soft-edged imagery—what Inness might have called "dishwater"—and obscure renderings of rural New England inhabited by romantic female figures, represent an essence of mind as much as an attitude. Or, as the historian Charles Caffin observed: "They are expressions of a singularly beautiful condition of the soul."[89] There is something of the romantic conjuring of an isolated personality in Fuller: perhaps a character like Wharton's Ethan Frome, or a spectral or dying hired hand out of Frost. Fuller tapped into the same wellsprings of late nineteenth-century romantic longing as Longfellow did, glimpsed in the tales of Hawthorne and the elegiac poetry of Whittier. There is much of old New England in George Fuller, a place of abandoned farms and abandoned dreams and the ghosts of absent lives. The cultural historian Lewis Mumford noted of Fuller's work in his 1931 study of nineteenth-century art and architecture, *The Brown Decades*,". . . all suggested that nostalgia for beauty that haunted and plagued the severe Puritan mind. He gave in to the desire, and in the act of painting did his best to suppress it. Nothing comes out of the background sharply and boldly; but the world is seen through a pervasive mist, vague, tender, in which the forms are evanescent and only the atmosphere is stable."[90]

George Fuller made an early living as an itinerant portrait painter in Boston and New York and gained enough distinction in the trade to be made an associate of the National Academy in 1857. He managed to get to Europe for a brief tour and a meeting with Dante Gabriel Rossetti in England, but a crisis on the family farm in Deerfield forced him to take over the failing venture and he spent the following two decades of his life working as a farmer and raising a family, at something of a remove from the art world. In June of 1876, William Morris Hunt viewed Fuller's paintings on his farm in South Deerfield, Massachusetts, and was so impressed by what he saw that he arranged for an exhibition of Fuller's work—twelve new canvases and two older ones— at Doll and Richards Gallery in Boston. Fuller's farm was nearly bankrupt at this point and the exhibition proved to be a godsend, spurring many sales and essentially reviving Fuller's career as an artist. Fuller's low-toned autumnal visions of the fading world of New England farm life had probably been inspired by Hunt in the first place, and by the Barbizon masters he had been touting to Boston tastemakers for two decades. *The Tomato Patch*, circa 1878 (fig. 2.40), demonstrates Fuller's absorption of Hunt's late landscape style in the emphasis on broadly painted masses, high horizons, and limited tonal range, which produce an elegiac feel for a world and time that are passing.

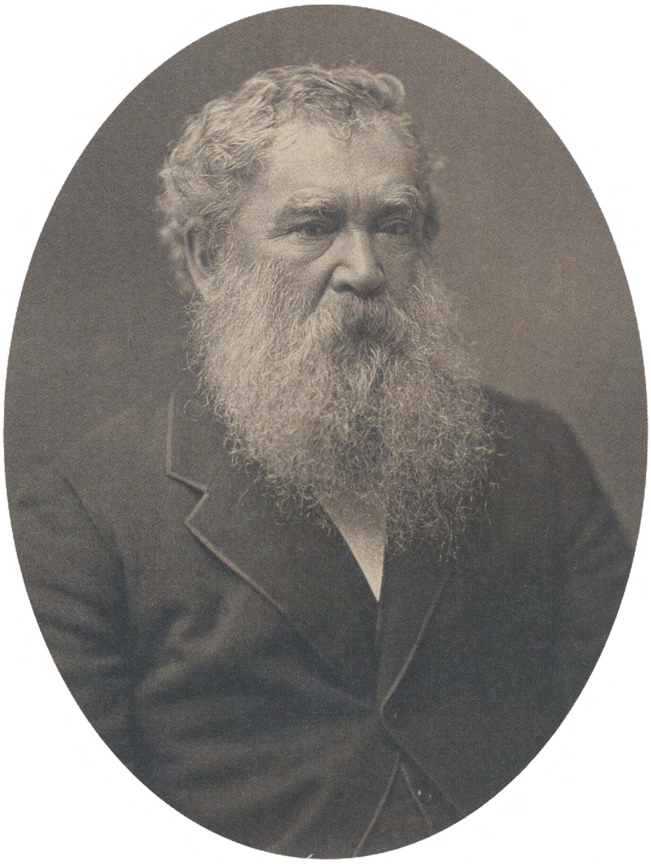


Fig. 2.39. George Fuller photographed c. 1883. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

In an 1877 *Atlantic Monthly* review, it was the poetry of the work of Fuller, along with that of Hunt, and another Boston painter, J. Appleton Brown (who was heavily influenced by Barbizon modes), that was singled out as distinctive: "[T]here is in all their works an element of poetry, whether of incident, or of suggestion, or, more fundamentally important than either, that strictly pictorial kind of poetry which is the artist's intense appreciation of the beauty of form, of color, of the effects of light and shade, which he finds in his subject and which become the motive of his picture, the reason why he paints it, its inspiration." The same reviewer noted of a Hunt landscape, "No photograph, no pre-Raphaelite rendering of sticks and stones, could give this impression, could have this suggestiveness. It is not a portrait of a field as it actually was, but as it appeared to the quick sense of the poet-maker."[91]

Fuller's suggestiveness, his dreamscapes, his parochial idealism, and glazed-down luminosity caught the mood of his contemporaries. Astonishingly, given that Fuller was often dismissed for his lack of a sound technique, of elasticity and clarity of color, his quietist and wistful art was acclaimed by the most advanced artists returning from Europe—with all their hard-won skills. In 1878, Fuller was invited to join the membership of the radical Society of American Artists, presumably at the prompting of La Farge, Hunt, and most likely the New England landscape painter Robert Swain Gifford, who was a friend. It was the emotional tenor and sincerity of his art that impressed Fuller's contemporaries. *Afterglow*, circa 1880 (fig. 2.41), which depicts a shawled figure standing in the gloaming of a sheltering wood anticipates—and possibly presages—the solitary meditative figures of Inness's late work. These are the shimmering sunsets and pellucid woodlands found throughout Thoreau's journals. Or, as Frank Jewett Mather observed: "In his pictures it is always eventide. His figures do not act and have never acted. They simply exist and seek sympathy. Their appeal is discreet and muted, merely implicit. Their mood is as veiled as their forms, which shimmer uncertainly in the enveloping dusk. They live not in any world of ours, but, as Fuller once said he wanted them to live, 'in a world of their own.'"[92]

That Fuller, like Albert Pinkham Ryder, also a New Englander and an early member of the Society of American

Artists, should be embraced by the most progressive art organization of the day, given Fuller's and Ryder's technical shortcomings, reveals much about the values of the upcoming generation of painters and critics at this time—a generation that touted artistic integrity above all things, especially sincerity, poetic insight, mystical reverie, and individuality. These were the virtues that many felt were grounded in the bedrock of America's rural traditions. Dreamy, veiled, diffuse, scrubbed of prosaic detail, and ultimately romantic as these visions might be, they were felt to contain a hard-bitten integrity as, in a more realistic and more technically correct vein, were Homer's narrative renditions of rural life. (The critic Charles de Kay always encouraged Winslow Homer to get more feeling into his work.) If Boston was two decades ahead of New York in the sophistication of its taste for advanced art, Boston and New England values—Transcendentalist nostalgia and high-minded regard for a life close to the land—infused the New York art world, and ultimately that of the nation, by virtue of the artists, critics, poets, teachers, and thinkers who plied their talents in the city. Ultimately, it was a very American dynamic, an amalgam of sophistication and sentiment, both nostalgia for the past and embrace of the present—the never quite realized fusion of the real and ideal, that produced a receptivity among collectors for the likes of George Fuller and the Tonalist landscapes of his contemporaries. The faults and weaknesses of such indigenous American artists—particularly their lack of European training and years spent in foreign ateliers—were regarded as their peculiar strengths, allowing the expression of a pure and unadulterated American spirit. Fuller's glimpses and half-glimpses of a faltering way of life cast a remarkable spell upon the imagination of buyers of art right up to the 1920s. In 1915, a Fuller figurative work sold at auction for more than ten thousand dollars.

As we now turn to chapter 3 and to those American landscape artists who studied abroad and returned to America, it is worth reviewing the transformative process that took place: first, during their pilgrimage to Europe's artistic shrines, where their technical skills were painfully won in the ateliers of Munich and Paris—the gold standard of European training; second, as the Americans interacted among themselves, sharing and developing new ideas, especially in the American artist colonies in Brittany; third, how the expatriates responded to the weather conditions in Europe, the cloudy, pearly gray skies that so many found congenial to a tonal art; and fourth, how all the artistic baggage of their European years was, upon their return, modified by American circumstances and cultural predispositions. Foremost among these American realities was the taste for the deeply expressive landscapes that Hunt,

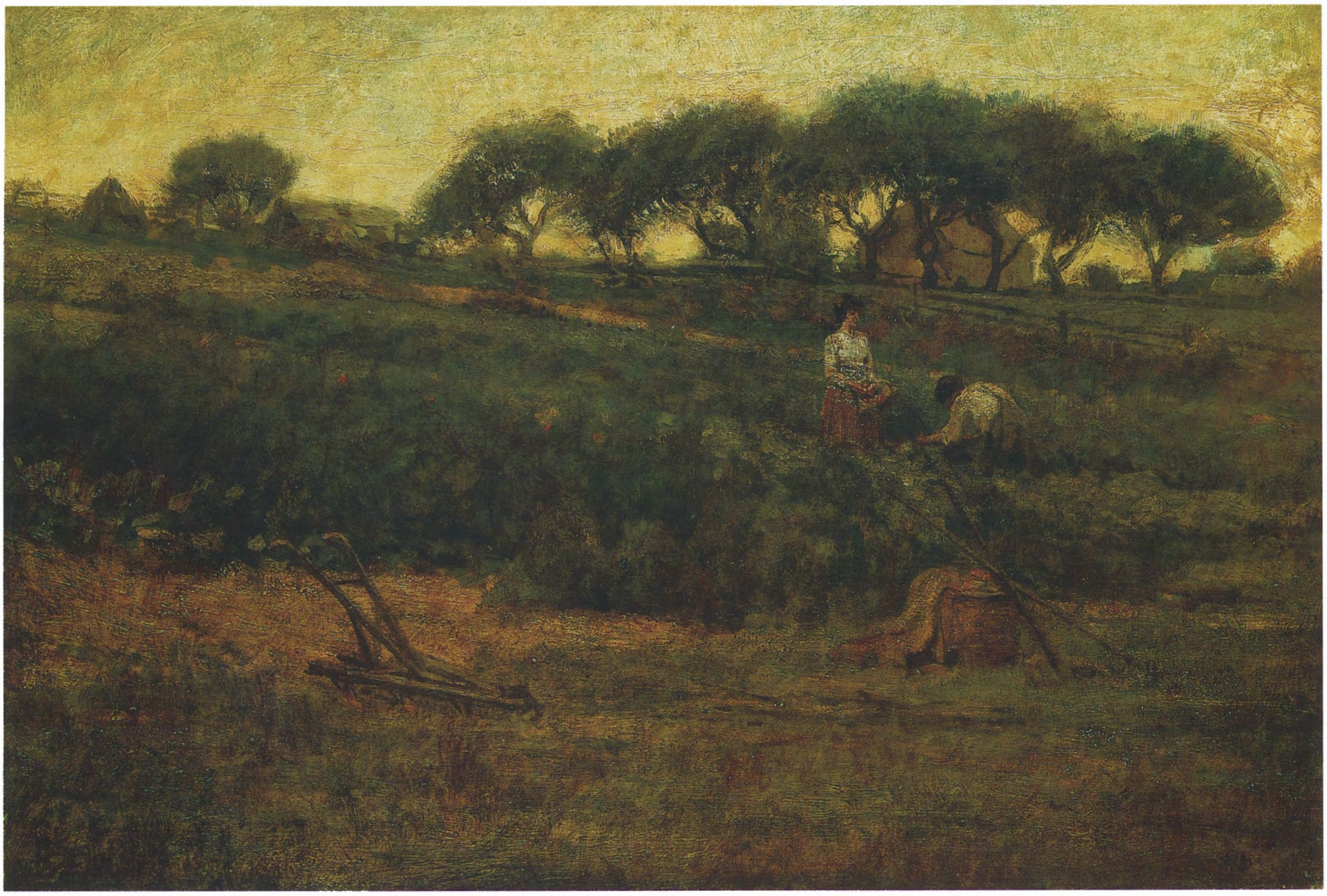


Fig. 2.40. George Fuller, *The Tomato Patch*, c. 1878. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Detroit Institute of Arts, gift of Raymond C. Smith.

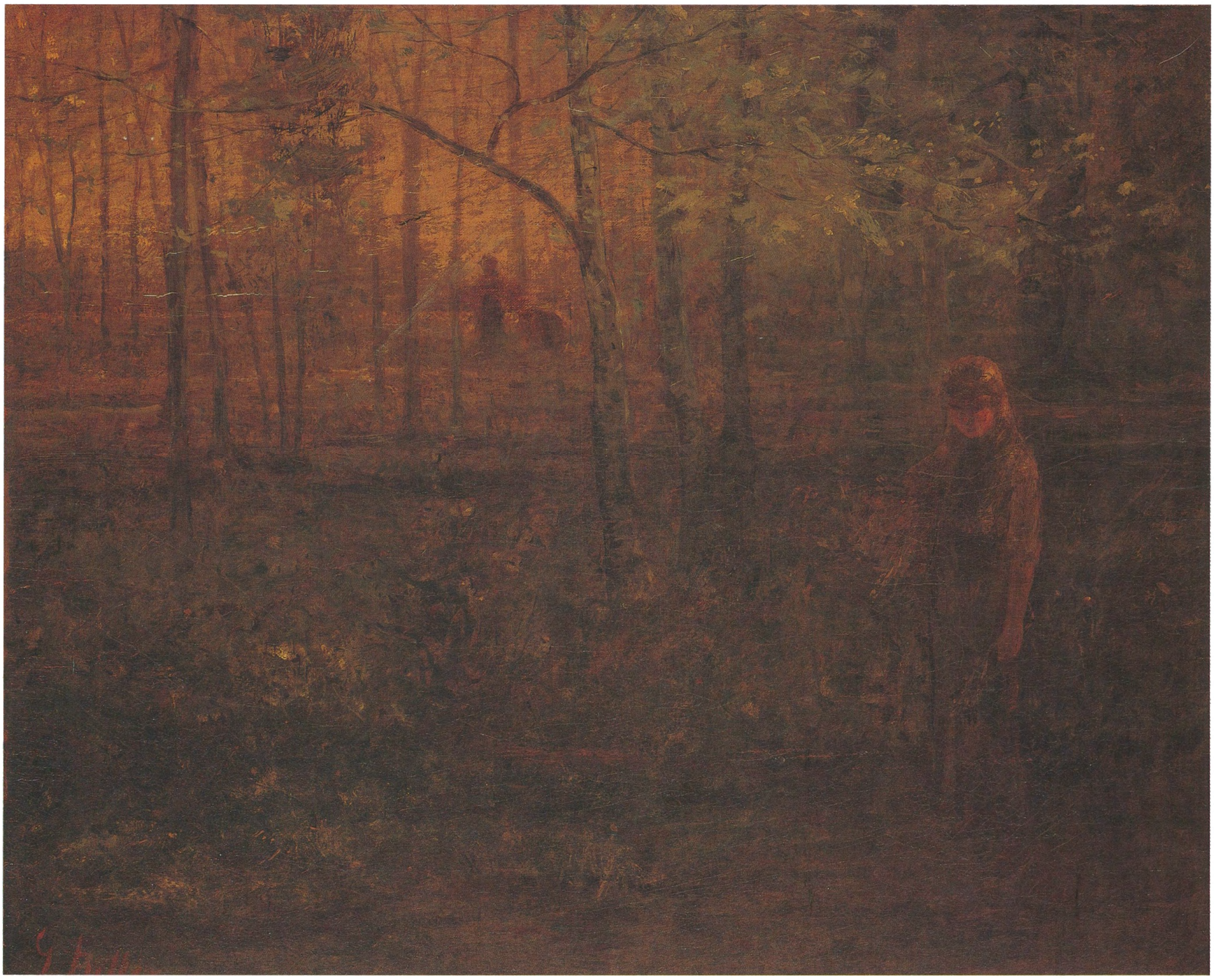
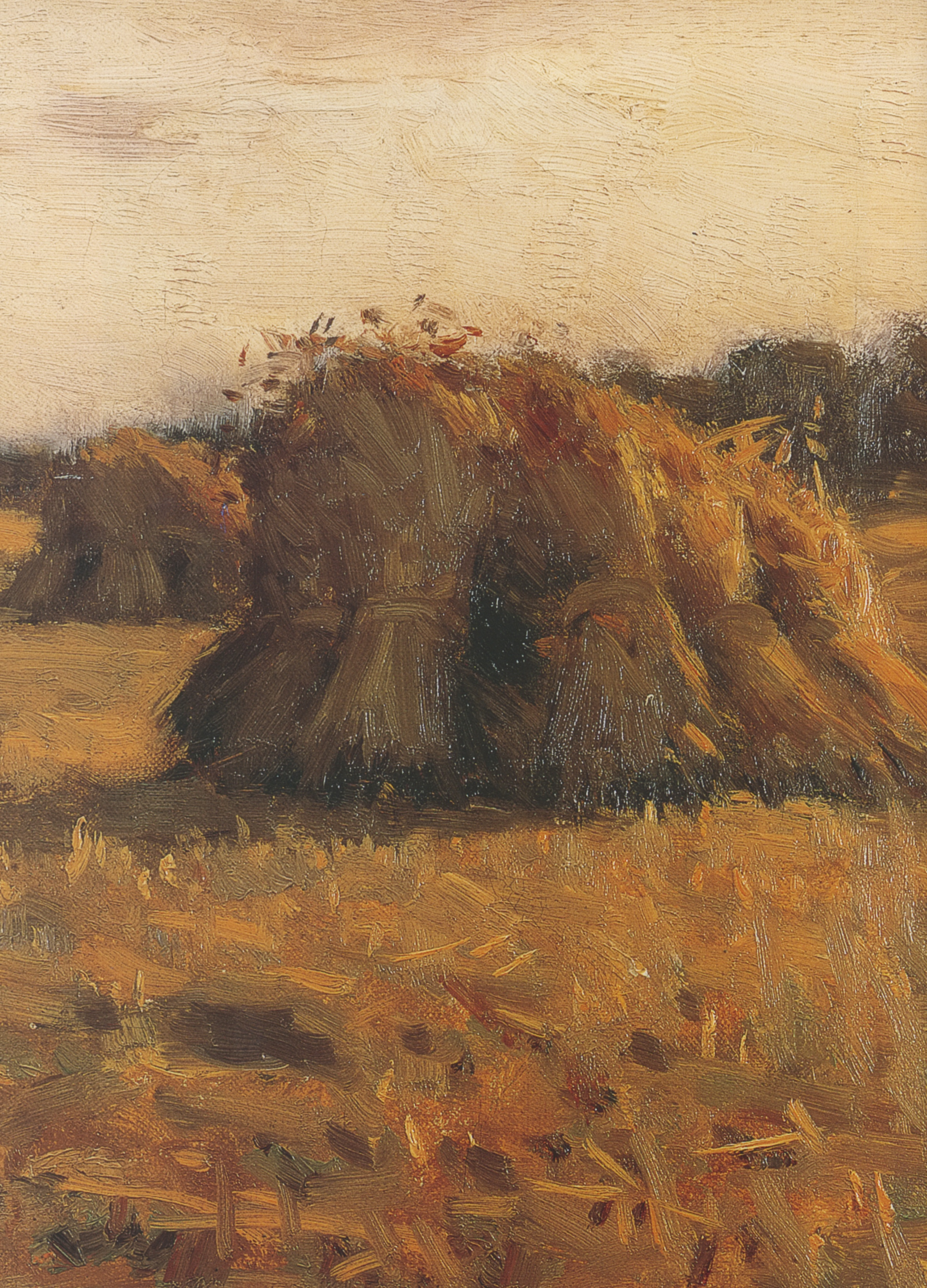


Fig. 2.41. George Fuller, *Afterglow*, c. 1880. Oil on canvas, 22⅜ x 27½ in. Acquired 1959, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

La Farge, Inness, Martin, Wyant, and Fuller had first developed in the 1870s—a taste and market that had largely won out by the turn of 1880. It was a market that would shape the output of both landscape and figurative artists. Concurrently, the indigenous landscape tradition after 1880, taken up by the second-generation Tonalists largely unschooled in Europe, also contributed to the flowering of the Tonalist landscape. These indigenous landscapists included visionary romantics like Albert Pinkham Ryder and Ralph Albert Blakelock, Robert Swain Gifford (another New Englander and early convert from the Hudson River School), and others like Charles Warren Eaton, Charles Harry Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, and J. Francis Murphy. The amalgamation of these two streams, the indigenous with the foreign trained, combining European sophistication with homespun styles under the synthesizing impact of Whistler and the Aesthetic movement, becomes the central story of the following chapters. It is a story that moves from Boston to the European training grounds and back to New York, the artistic milieu out of which Tonalism as a distinct American style emerges full-blown in the 1880s.



CHAPTER THREE

The Old World versus the New: American Tonalists in Europe—Munich, Paris, and Brittany; The Art and Influence of Whistler

The Munich School

Of the four European centers for art study, Munich, Paris and Brittany, London, and Antwerp and The Hague, Munich had the most profound early influence on the ranks of the Society of American Artists, prompting the modernist innovations in the New York art world of the late 1870s. During the 1870s Munich's Royal Academy of Art produced a vogue for a post–old master style employing the free brushstroke of Franz Hals with a tenebrous tonal unity of tinted varnishes or "brown sauce," an approximation of the time-darkened canvases of the Dutch school. Broadly speaking, the Munich approach stressed painterly and colorist skills rather than the French academic focus on drawing and figure work. In terms of the development of the Tonalist movement, four artists with Munich backgrounds figure prominently: Frank Duveneck, J. Frank Currier, John Henry Twachtman, and William Merritt Chase, with Henry Muhrman and William Gedney Bunce providing supporting roles. Duveneck was a fantastic innovator and inspirational figure and teacher to a generation—the "Duveneck Boys," as they were called—but only an occasional landscape painter. His early landscapes of the late 1870s, painted under the influence of Currier, are enormous achievements far in advance of their time. Chase, too, was not primarily a landscape painter, although his small landscapes of scenes near his New York home in the 1880s, influenced by Whistlerian aestheticism, are exquisite examples of intimate Tonalism. Chase was a painter's painter, a pure painter of the seen object, a master of the brilliant external aspect of things, who could display—and convincingly teach—every technical trick in the repertoire. Or, as Frank Jewett Mather Jr. aptly observed: "Chase believed art to be a fine manufacture, and in his hands it became such—a manufacture intelligently and delicately fine."[1] Chase would captain the Society of American Artists during its formative years and his teaching at the Art Students League and later in other settings would pass on the bravura manipulation of pigment—the quintessential flame of the Munich School—to legions of followers. (A more complete look at Chase's landscape work of the 1880s appears in chapter 5, when this work is analyzed and can be better understood in the context of Chase's contemporaries.)

OPPOSITE: Charles Harold Davis. *Haystacks*, c. 1885. (detail of fig. 3.41).

Duveneck and Chase retained a fundamental allegiance to figurative and genre subject matter, the mainstay of Munich, though both modified and moved away from a purely Munich look in their art as they took on the broader refinements of French painting. Twachtman, too, early on gave up his painterly Munich style for French and Whistlerian modes, though his early landscapes are dazzling for their expressive fire and verve of execution. Only Currier fully exploited the expressive power and suggestive old-master tonalities of the Munich School in his radical landscapes in watercolor, pastel, charcoal, and oil of the late 1870s and 1880s. Currier and Twachtman, artist's artists of the highest order, profoundly influenced the Tonalist movement. Currier encouraged a generation, including Winslow Homer, to employ freer, bolder brushwork and more muted tonalities; Twachtman's refinement, technical finesse, and all-pervasive feeling for subtle design made him a beacon to his fellow artists. Twachtman demonstrated a supreme ability to soak up technical and stylistic innovations from a variety of European sources and turn them into breathtaking original landscapes: innovative, personal, and very American. The all-but-forgotten Henry Muhrman and William Gedney Bunce contributed significantly to modernist trends—Muhrman with his watercolors and pastels, and Bunce with his near-abstractions of Venice. It is noteworthy that few of these artists made a living exclusively from their art; all were dependent to some degree on teaching or outside incomes, another indication of the difficulty these radical voices experienced in the painfully slow development of the American art market—still captivated by the European competition—in the decades of the 1880s and 1890s. The "Munich Men," as they were described by contemporary critics, injected into the American art scene an appreciation for exuberant gestural brushstrokes and an affinity for brooding tonalities, harking back to Velásquez. Munich-derived Tonalism and Whistlerian Tonalism have a family resemblance that can be traced to a reliance on the somber end of the tonal scale, and a shared genetic inheritance from the painterly values of the old masters. Thus it is little wonder that many of the Munich men effortlessly absorbed the more ethereal graces of Whistler's art.

When Frank Duveneck began working in Munich at the Royal Academy of Art in 1870, the city was a hotbed of artistic industry and innovation. The influence of the French Barbizon landscapists and the realism of Courbet and Manet had caught fire in the academy under artist and director Karl von Piloty and painting instructor Wilhelm Diez, abetted and encouraged by the Munich master of radical realism, Wilhelm Leibl (fig. 3.1). Around Diez and Leibl a generation of American artists would congregate and absorb their style. It was a style that stressed a reverence for the supple, telling brushwork of old-master painters, especially Franz Hals and Velásquez, an alla prima (all in one) technique of pigment use, and painting wet into wet, thus displaying a free and deceptively sketchlike feel. Brush marks were expressive and exciting, providing a surface allure of creamy pigment, a kind of dazzling virtuoso performance art. An old master feel for chiaroscuro values—fundamentally tonal in sensibility—was emphasized, sometimes with contrasting brilliant lights and somber darks. Modeling was accomplished with warm colors for lighted areas and cool for the background. Idealized subject matter was rejected in favor of vivid realism and dramatic characterization. Leibl and his followers believed in demonstrating how pictorial form was achieved; they scorned overpainting or over-finished pictures with excessive glazing. In the 1870s, Munich offered young American artists, many of German extraction, an alternative to the academic rigidity of the Paris ateliers and the École des Beaux-Arts, which put more emphasis on technical refinement based on drawing and working from the live figure. Munich was about painting qua painting, and color for color's sake. Of the Parisian ateliers, Hunt's teacher Thomas Couture was closest to the colorist sensibility of the Munich School. As an artistic community, Munich was more down to earth than Paris, allowing a budding artistic personality a freer range of expression. When the Munich style, in the hands of Duveneck, Chase, Twachtman, Muhrman, Bunce, and Currier, exploded on the New York art scene in the mid-1870s, its slashing brushwork was often referred to as "impressionist," which meant to most critics a sketchlike first impression or free study that lacked traditional finish, and not necessarily a reference to the followers of Monet or Renoir.

Frank Duveneck (1848–1919)

As a young man, Frank Duveneck made his way quickly and brilliantly in Munich, producing dazzling portraits and genre subjects that won praise from his teachers and fellow students. By 1875 he already had a triumph in Boston with an exhibition of his portraits, and as these and other genre works made their way into New York exhibitions in the late 1870s, the impact of the Munich School began to be felt in New York art circles. Duveneck's dashing style would prompt John Singer Sargent's remark, "After all's said, Frank Duveneck is the greatest talent of the brush of this generation."[2] A big exuberant personality, Duveneck soon developed a following of American students in his own right after his return to Munich in 1875 from a visit to his hometown of Cincinnati and his successful exhibition at the Boston Art Club organized by Hunt. In the summer of 1876, Duveneck along with other American students in Munich moved to the charming rural village of Polling, about sixty miles south of Munich, to work outdoors. There, he and the others came under the dynamic influence of fellow American artist J. Frank Currier. Currier's expressive landscape style painted outdoors helped Duveneck break loose from the academic formalities of his studio training. Often Duveneck and Currier painted side by side, and in the case of a pair of

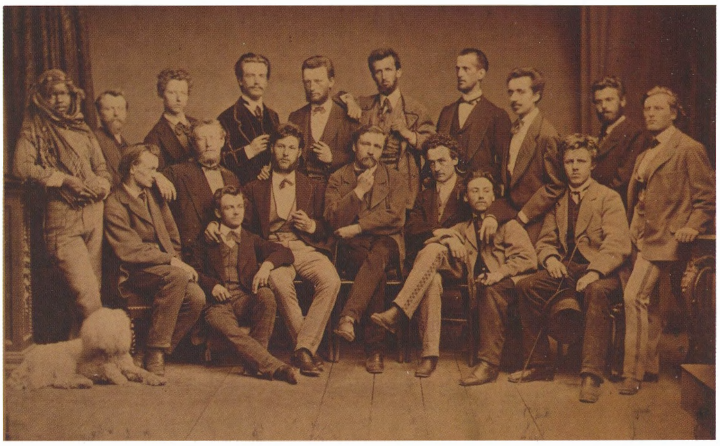


Fig. 3.1. Class taught by Wilhelm Diez, photographed in Munich, 1871. Sepia print, 9 x 12 in. Courtesy Frank and Elizabeth Boott Duveneck papers, 1851–1972, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

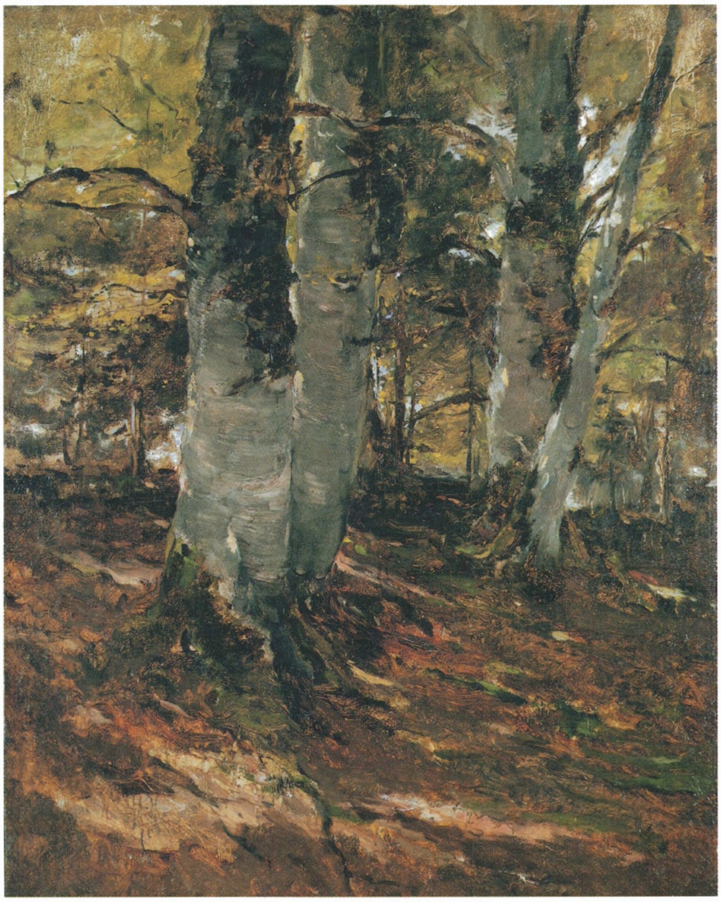


Fig. 3.2. Frank Duveneck, *Beechwoods at Polling*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 45½ x 37 in. Cincinnati Art Museum, gift of the artist. 1915.93.

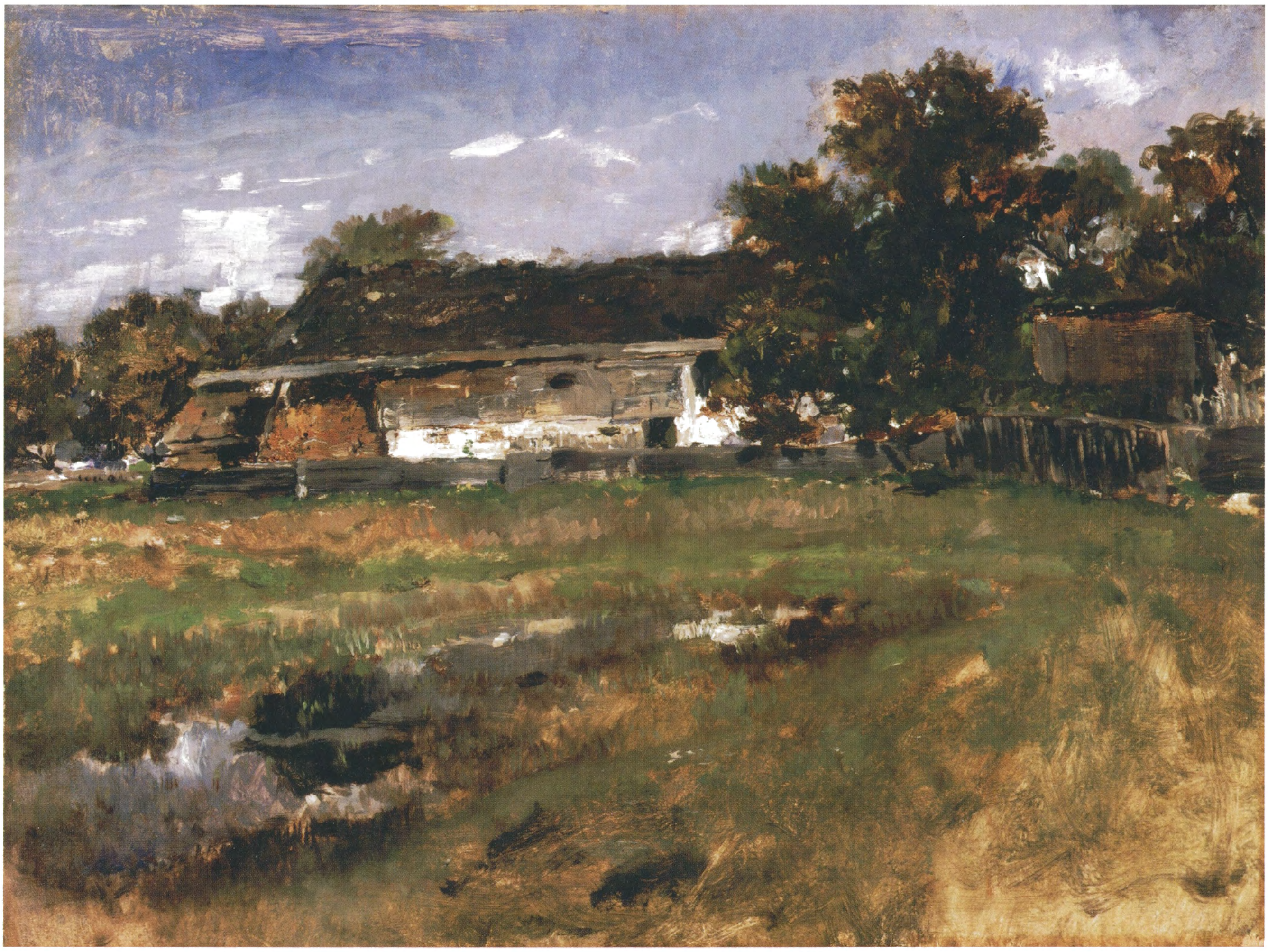


Fig. 3.3. Frank Duveneck, *Landscape, Polling, Bavaria*, c. 1878. Oil on canvas, 23 x 31. Cincinnati Art Museum, gift of the artist. 1915.127.

beech trees, painted the same scene from different angles or perspectives. Duveneck's *Beechwoods at Polling*, 1878 (fig. 3.2), and Currier's *Beech Trees*, 1878 (see fig. 3.6), show how closely aligned the two artists were in their early years. Duveneck's version displays all the freedom of paint handling—wet-into-wet paint—of the Munich style: tawny red-sienna and earth colors spill in ribbons of pigment down the foreground slope, the trunks are sculpted with luscious grays, while the limbs of the trees are dashed off with calligraphic grace. The feel for dappled light is created with exuberant scribbles of pigment. There is no attempt at high finish, while a display of technique for its own sake is fully indulged. Duveneck's lush extravaganza of color presses dramatically to the front plane of the canvas where it takes on the aspect of painted relief. With *Landscape, Polling, Bavaria* (fig. 3.3), circa 1878, Duveneck creates another unconventional composition, filling his high foreground with electric passages of low-toned earthy greens and browns jigging across the tan surface of the prepared canvas—a bit of which shows through in the right foreground. By 1881, after his first visit to Venice where he met Whistler, Duveneck returned to Polling and painted *Polling Landscape*, 1881 (fig. 3.4). More sedate and classically composed than his earlier Polling landscapes, the work displays marvelous and dexterous passages of pure painting, at once controlled and gestural in the sumptuous gray-greens of the foreground reeds and the sedate patterns of muted reflection in the water. Something of the artist's exposure to Whistler's pastels in Venice must have rubbed off, especially the summary rendition of relevant detail and sketchy generalization of the landscape forms, all contained within a limited tonal range to underscore the serenity of nature. Duveneck's landscapes exemplify the case of an academy-trained artist—in this case one with the Munich style at his fingertips—who was able to take studio technique outdoors and render a scene with great panache and vigor, combining the discipline of the studio with the emotional sensations of the outdoors, thus transmuting sensation into aesthetic object. George Inness's *A Gray Lowery Day* (see fig. 2.14) of a few years earlier, shares a similar immediacy, an expressive vigor hovering on the front plane of the canvas, registering with the viewer both in terms of a visualized place and as a formal manipulation of space with brilliantly executed color.

It is one of the great losses to American art that Frank Duveneck never replicated the splendor and freshness of these early landscapes, a failure that affected all other areas of his art

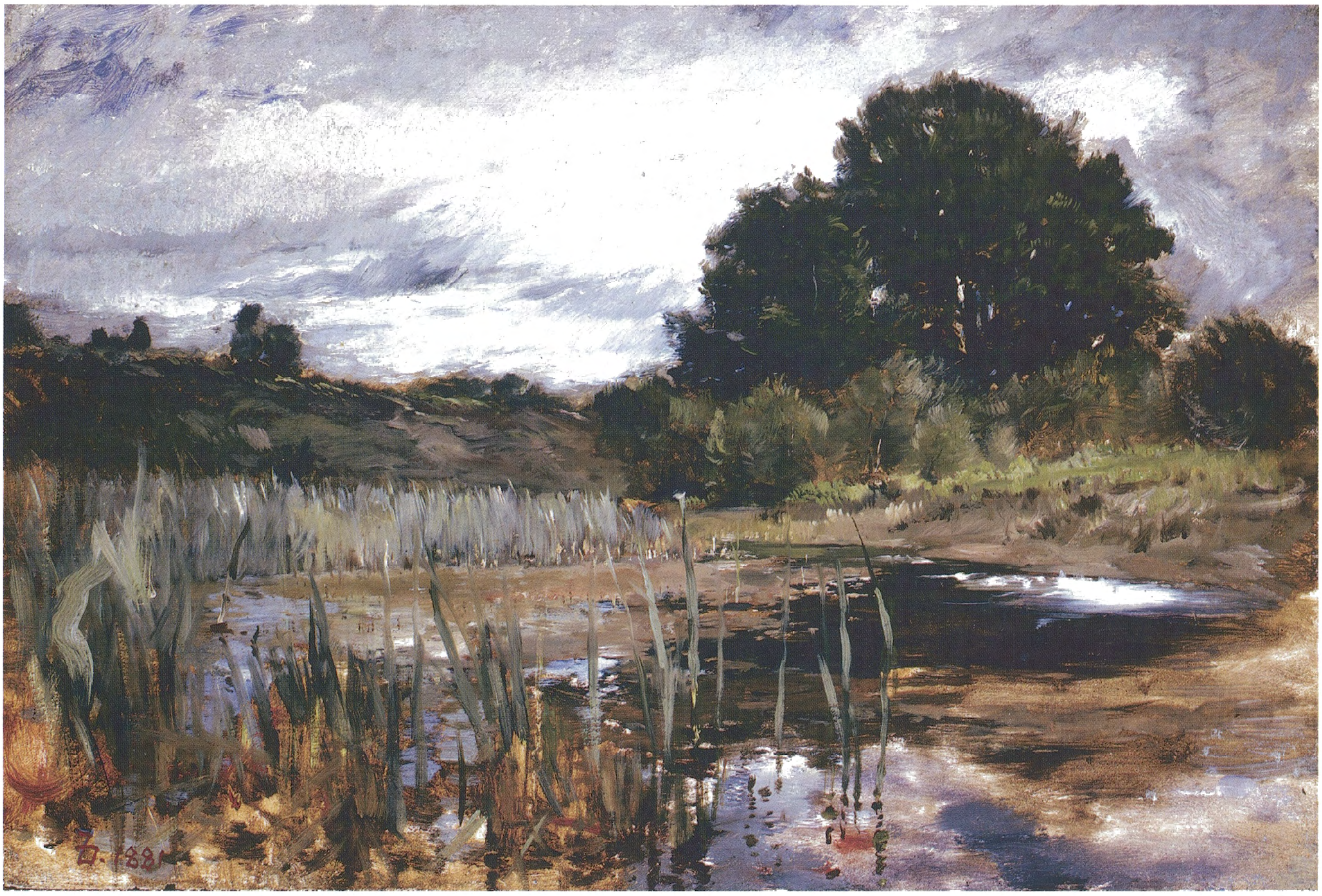


Fig. 3.4. Frank Duveneck, *Polling Landscape*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Indianapolis Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Charles P. Mattingly, in memory of Charles Stayton Drake, 72.136.

as well. During his repeated trips to Venice from 1879 on, he painted and etched many marvelous things; he drew on the inspiration of Whistler; he passed his enthusiasm on to friends and colleagues like Chase, Twachtman, and many others. But complications with his marriage and ultimately the death of his wife brought on a slackening in his work both in quality and quantity. Many of his late landscapes are very fine, if conventional, but are mere reminders of what Duveneck might have done if his artistic life had moved in more propitious directions. He remained a legend among his contemporaries, but sadly, an artist who never fulfilled the enormous promise of his early Munich work.

J. Frank Currier (1843–1909)

If any artist can be said to hve channeled pure feeling, it is J. Frank Currier (fig. 3.5) Just as Frank Duveneck was a storied teacher to a generation, so Currier was a touchstone of artistic integrity and raw expressive genius for a score of American expatriates. Fellow artists like William Merritt Chase collected his work. His watercolors, which went on view in New York for the first time in the late 1870s, constituted a watershed in American art, influencing Winslow Homer and countless others in their reach for greater freedom of expression; he was idolized by his fellow artists for the untrammeled purity of his creative instinct. Currier was a fascinating and relatively rare example of how a peculiar native-bred American sensibility could take flight in a foreign setting. In Munich, or more precisely the Bavarian countryside, Currier produced some of the most important and revolutionary landscape work by any late-nineteenth-century artist, European or American. Only Whistler, Alexander Harrison, Charles Harold Davis, and possibly Henry Muhrman and Charles Fromuth among expatriates, achieved renown of a comparable kind. Currier was a born-and-bred Transcendentalist who emerged from the Boston artistic milieu of the 1860s. The young Currier was a sensitive and idealistic man, who loved to play the piano and was drawn early on to the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, and he would refer to them constantly in his European diaries. Art was his wellspring and impelled him to turn away from his father's stone-working business and from a stint in banking. Currier probably studied with Hunt or at least was influenced by Hunt; however, it was the two summers he spent working with the Tonalist George Fuller in Deerfield, Massachusetts, that left a lasting influence. From the start, Currier was attracted to rural landscapes bathed in atmospheric light, and he painted landforms with broad rhythms that created bold patterns.

Supported by his successful father, he left for Europe to study art in 1869, not to return to Boston for almost thirty years.

Currier's diaries record the artist's thoughts as he sampled what Antwerp and Paris had to offer, before he finally settled in Munich. His reflections portray a quintessentially American—specifically, New England—worldview: "A voice has been urging me for days, drop the figure; you are not fitted for it. It will lead you a life of trouble and vexation.... My studio shall be wherever some beautiful thought in nature for a time holds me. I think I will have a 'Walden' near by to bathe in. If with all these things I cannot keep a clear conscience and be at peace, I shall despair of myself.... In countless ranks (clouds) they pressed forward down to the red golden line at the horizon in heaved and twisted forms, with eager intent driven restlessly on by yet higher weary, undefined spirits in the rear. In purple—in broad wet splashes—the sky that indescribable gray—lower down the crimson, then the golden streak. I have learned one thing—'tis in the early morning and at eve that Nature is at her best and does her greatest work....' I must always regard Nature through the medium of thought, remembering that all material is but the means of expressing an idea."[3]

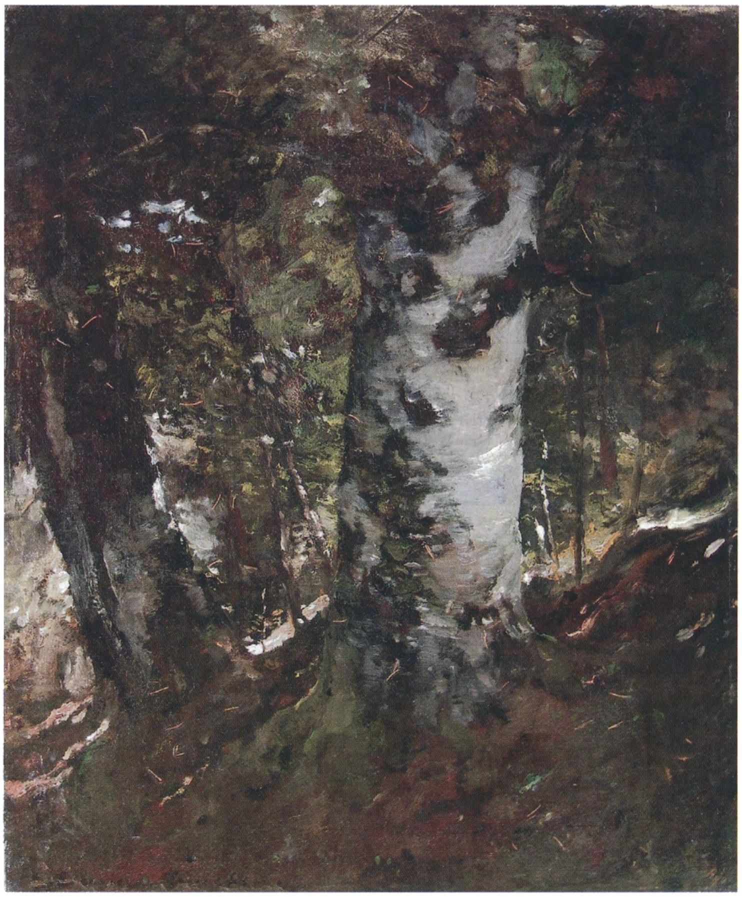


Fig. 3.6. J. Frank Currier, *Beech Trees*, c. 1878. Oil on canvas, 26 x 22 in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

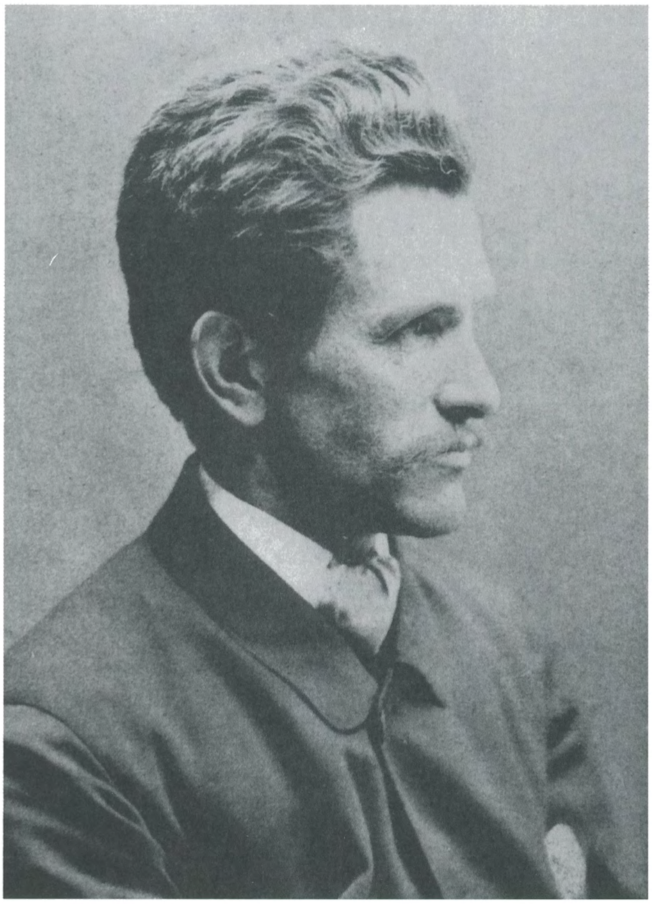


Fig. 3.5. J. Frank Currier

At age twenty-seven, Currier was already a devoted follower of Thoreau and probably Emerson, and recognized from the earliest moment of his career that his subjective reaction to nature was to be the central motif of his art—its driving force. When Currier settled in Munich in 1870—possibly avoiding Paris because of the Franco-Prussian War—he only studied for a few years at the Royal Academy of Art, withdrawing in 1872 to work on his own. He married and was soon surrounded by a growing family and his many artist friends who arrived from America. He relocated to the tiny village of Schleissheim, about thirty-five miles north of Munich, where he would increasingly pursue landscape painting along with occasional portraits and genre.

In the spring or summer of 1877, Currier joined Duveneck, Chase, and other American artists in the small, picturesque German resort town of Polling. Although Duveneck and Chase have lasting reputations as exponents of the Munich style, during his few years in Polling, it was Currier, five years older than Duveneck and Chase, who was the guiding force and inspirational light for a generation of Munich-based artists, including John Henry Twachtman, William Gedney Bunce, and Henry Muhrman. It is hard to conceive of Duveneck's Polling landscapes without the galvanizing influence of Currier. Currier's *Beech Trees*, circa 1878 (fig. 3.6), and Duveneck's *Beechwoods at Polling* (fig. 3.2) were painted together in 1878 and display the dynamic interaction of the two artists. *Forest Edge (Polling)*, circa 1878 (fig. 3.7), demonstrates the ways in

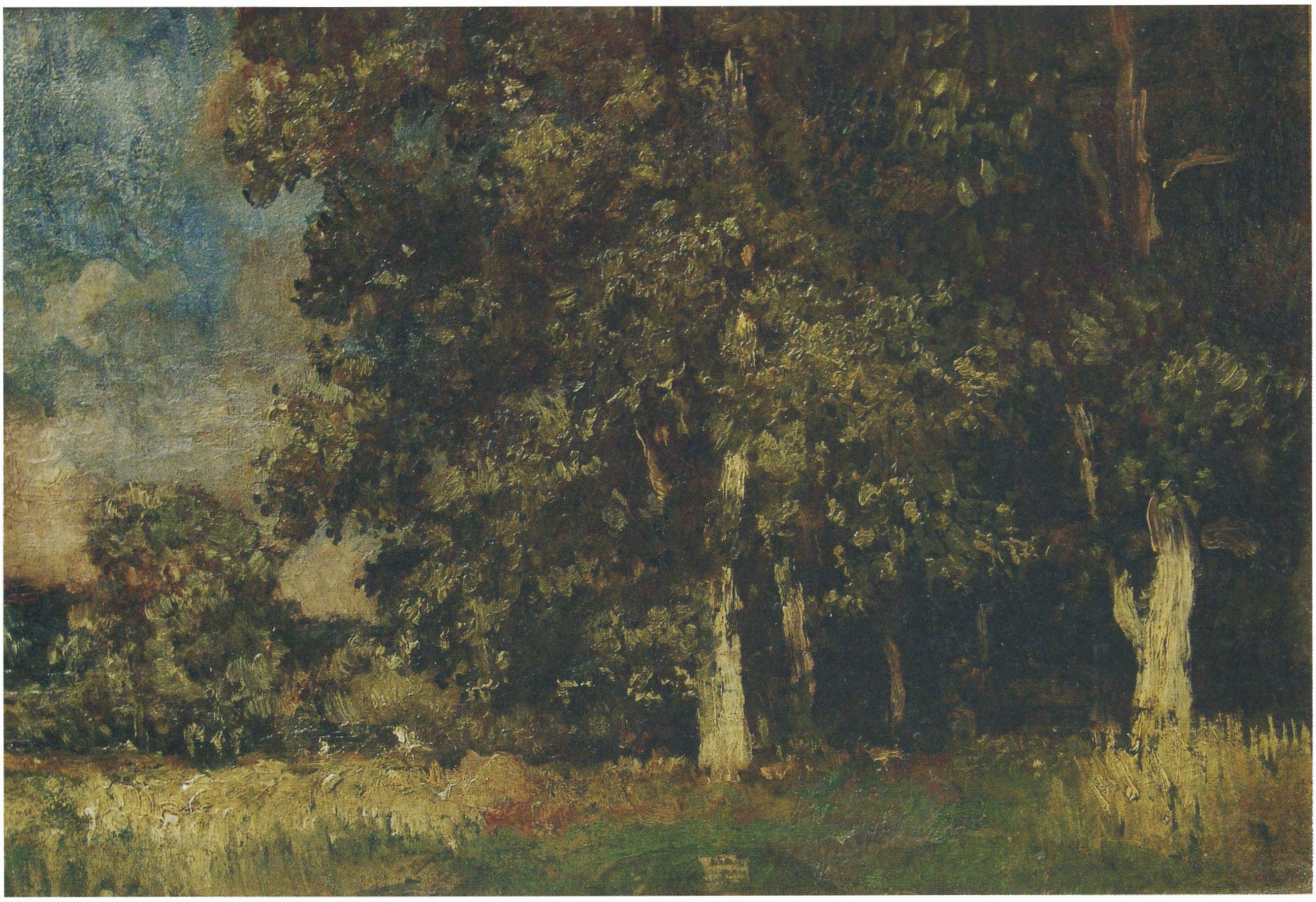


Fig. 3.7. J. Frank Currier, *Forest Edge (Polling)*, c. 1878. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22¼ in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

which Currier adapted Wilhelm Leibl's energized brushstrokes and emphasis on realism to his more subjective depiction of the natural world. Foreground grasses and, foliage, and churning sky beyond are rendered with daring paint handling and abandon. Executed *en plein air*, as were many of Currier's landscapes, the canvas surface pulses with emotion-charged particles of paint as if created at fever pitch. For its time, *Forest Edge (Polling)* is extraordinarily modern—an avatar of expressive Tonalism.

It was also during this period that Currier began exploring watercolors as his preferred medium for landscape. The freedom, ease, and spontaneity permitted by watercolor released innovative work from this transplanted New Englander. Currier's watercolor landscapes of Polling from the late 1870s spew forth with dash and vigor, displaying nuances of tone in barely controlled masses that swirl and flow, verging on the obliteration of form and near abstraction. It was these radical watercolors (figs. 3.8–3.13) that electrified his colleagues and sent shock waves through the New York art world when they were first exhibited in 1879.[4]

Currier's Revolution in Watercolor

The late 1870s were a heady period in the New York art world: Inness, Martin, and Wyant were making their presence felt with an expressive landscape art, while the work of returning artists from Paris and Munich—the figurative oils of Chase and Duveneck were the most controversial—were roiling the major exhibitions at the National Academy of Design and the new hotbed of radical innovation, the Society of American Artists. But it was Currier's abstract watercolors, radical in style and subject, exhibited at the American Watercolor Society in February of 1879, that provoked the biggest critical uproar of the day. Their impact and the storm of controversy they elicited among critics sparked some of the most crucial re-evaluations of style and subject matter in the history of American art. It is more remarkable still that such a clash between the old and new took place in the watercolor arena. By 1879, the watercolor had only recently gained the status of fine art, on a near par with oil painting. (For an in-depth discussion of watercolor in relation to Tonalism, see chap. 5) The American Watercolor Society, founded in 1866 in New York, tended to be a bastion of conservative taste; its large exhibitions of five hundred or more works reflected mostly narrative themes: genre, still life, figure, and landscape, along the line of the English school of tightly rendered, realistic watercolor. When Currier's group of wildly expressive free-form landscape watercolors were first encountered by the society's hanging committee, they were found to be so powerful, idiosyncratic, and obviously different

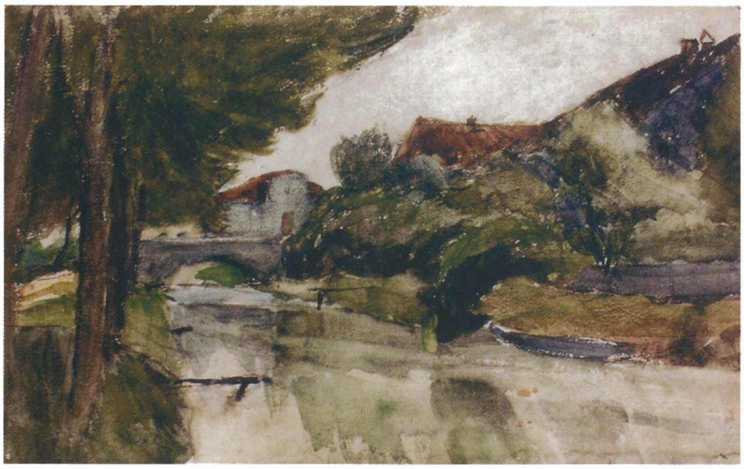


Fig. 3.8. J. Frank Currier, *Canal (Schleissheim)*, c. 1878. Watercolor, 16 x 26 in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

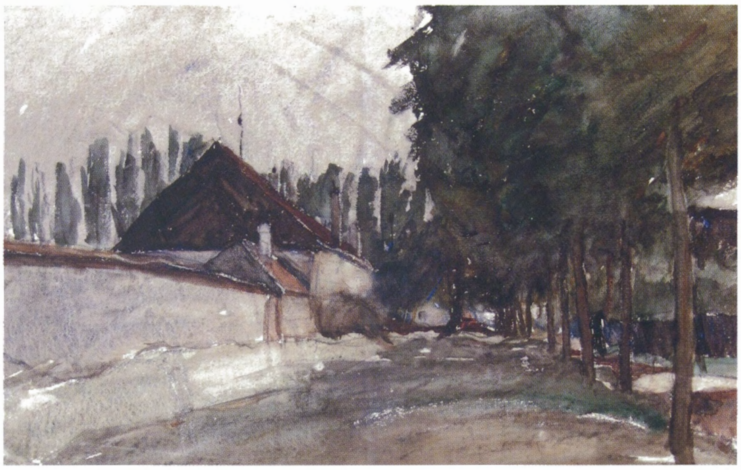


Fig. 3.9. J. Frank Currier, *Street Scene (Polling)*, c. 1878. Watercolor, 15⅞ x 25⅞ in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

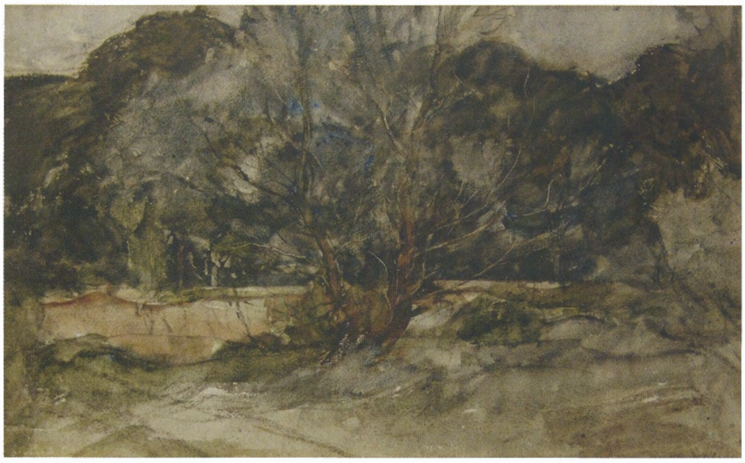


Fig. 3.10. J. Frank Currier, *Apple Tree (Polling)*, c. 1878. Watercolor, 15⅞ x 26 in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

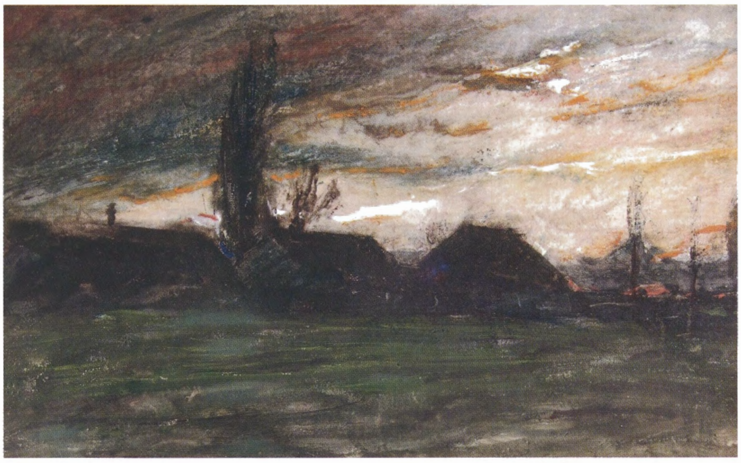


Fig. 3.11. J. Frank Currier, *Sunset (Schleissheim)*, c. 1878. Mixed media, 16½ x 25 in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

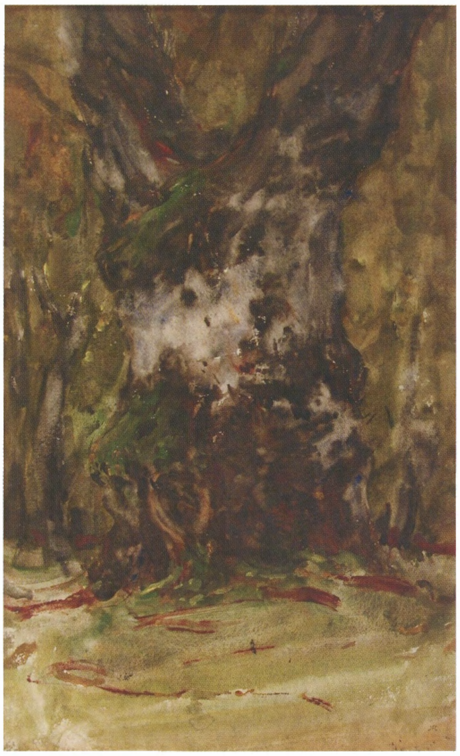


Fig. 3.12. J. Frank Currier, *Beechwood Interior (Polling)*, c. 1878. Watercolor, 26 x 15¾ in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

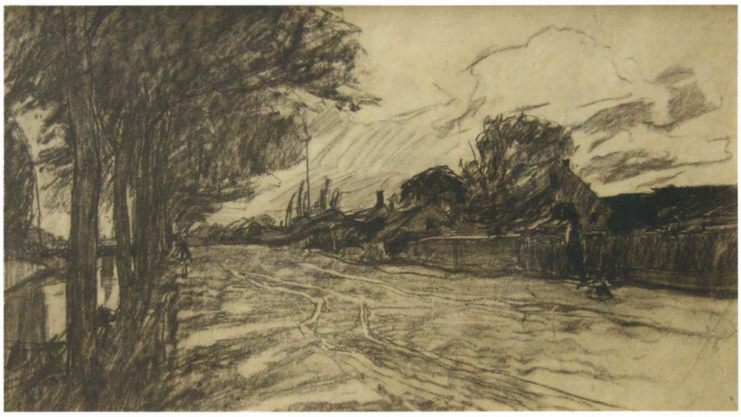


Fig. 3.13. J. Frank Currier, *Roadside Scene (Polling?)*, c. 1878. Charcoal and wash, 16½ x 26 in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

from anything else in the exhibition, that the decision was made to hang them as a group together with another selection of equally distinctive work—Homer's bucolic watercolors of the Houghton farm. This context immediately dramatized for the critics and public a generational clash in the making, one of technique, style, and subject matter. Currier's nine watercolors display a ravishing boldness of pure watercolor technique without use of gouache, or "body color," as it was called at the time—opaque color—to define form or add detail. Currier's aqueous clouds and tree forms, his large masses of earth and sky, tumble and jostle and merge together in soft-edged rhythms. The Munich style of bravura manipulation of oil is translated here into watercolor, as was something of the dusky tones of the old masters. Currier's wet-into-wet painting technique allows the pigment to run and spot and bump into surrounding forms; the artist tempts if not indulges accident and serendipity.

Reviwing the 1879 American Watercolor Society exhibition, the majority of critics found Currier's landscapes barely recognizable, certainly not at close range, and the artist's underlying abstraction of form seemed most radical. Of the major critics, six responded negatively, four ignored Currier, and three found value in the "Munich man's" work. To John Laffan of the *New York Sun*, Currier's watercolors appeared incomprehensible in style, subject, and composition, "arbitrary and capricious blots of color rudely splashed about the paper with no direct or intelligible reference to any outline or design or arrangement of form."[5] The critic of the *Mail* called Currier's work, "nightmare productions."[6] Until the 1879 exhibition, in the opinion of most critics, Whistler had represented the most radical force in American—and international—art. Critics who found something to like in Currier tended to appreciate the work as studies, working sketches, or first impressions of transitory effects. But the *New York Times* critic Charles de Kay (soon to become the most progressive critic of his era) was so struck by Currier's work that he began touting Currier's expressive style as a standard of excellence by which Homer's shortcomings might be measured. Only a year before at the opening of the first exhibition of the Society of American Artists, de Kay had described a Currier landscape as looking "like enamel painting upon goldsmith's work before the enamel is fused into shape and color." A Currier portrait drew praise from de Kay for "undeniable force."[7]

De Kay begins his review of the 1879 watercolor show by noting the appearance of "Impressionists" of various kinds, among whom he includes both Homer and Currier. The critic's interpretation of Impressionism is not the style of Monet and Renoir—of broken brushstrokes and primary colors and dazzling light—but a bravura style of dash, and immediacy that dispenses with side issues. For de Kay, Homer's work displays "vivid, fresh originality that has on one side a childlike directness and naiveté ... hits straight at the mark and leaves the unimportant in a picture to take care of itself." De Kay also describes Currier as an Impressionist and a troubling presence for older artists like Homer. "It is hardly fair to his pictures to put them on a line with others, because in looking from one to the next and suddenly coming upon them, the focus is quite lost, they are painted with such startling breadth. But from the other side of the room, these strange blendings or apparently meaningless colors resolve themselves into landscapes, wood interiors, skies of no mean excellence... [they] have a fine charm when viewed from a proper distance. The endeavor seems to be to make them look as bits of landscape really do at great distances, namely, brilliant as a whole yet indistinct in particulars. Just how to do this is, of course, the secret all are striving for. This method has its merits, and certainly deserves no such narrow vituperation as in some quarters it receives. It is especially fitted for recording the transient splendors of the sky and the very broadest landscape effects."[8]

Henry Muhrman (1854–1916)

Currier was not the only Munich-trained artist to make an impact. In his second review of the American Watercolor Society on February 5, 1879, Charles de Kay heralded the appearance of another Munich artist, Henry Muhrman, devoting no less than half his review to this compatriot of Currier, substantiating the view that Currier was spearheading a wider revolution in American art. De Kay describes the key to Muhrman's success: "He either has a natural gift at harmonious arrangement of colors or has been admirably grounded in the science of tones. Of course, a large proportion of natural aptitude would have to be understood in any case, for no amount of science will inculcate in a stupid or unapt mind matters of such delicate moment in art." The critic goes on to praise Muhrman's work for "excellence in the values of color, in harmony of tones, in boldness and freedom of brush." Another watercolor "gratifies the eye again, without having anything to say for itself, without telling any story. It is repressed in tones, well painted, and thoroughly adequate in every way.... The fact that the pictures of this young artist are only slightly attached to the names by which they take their place in the catalogue is not derogatory to him, but, on the contrary, may be used very reasonably as an argument that he has the true painter's instinct of seeking for the painter's thing, not the literary thing, in art."[9] Muhrman's *Tugboat, New York Harbor,* 1879 (fig. 3.14), displays the artist's facility and expressive use of watercolor, especially his ability to recreate an entire world from a limited range of abstract shapes and merged tones. Like Currier, Muhrman's brassy, quick laying-in of wet-into-wet pigments and indulgence of runoffs to render form must have been startling to the careful practitioners of watercolor in the English manner who dominated the exhibitions of the day. Muhrman has compressed his image, dramatizing the vertical components, especially the belching

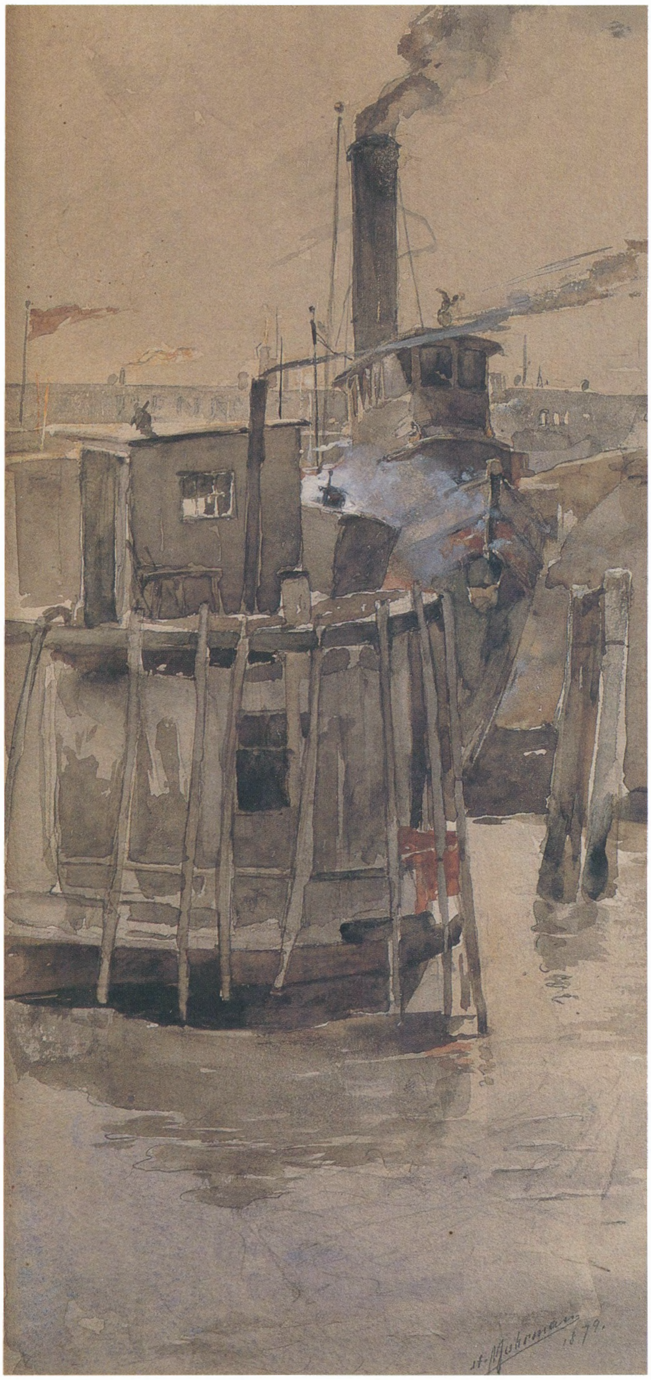


Fig. 3.14. Henry Muhrman, *Tugboat, New York Harbor,* 1879. Watercolor, 13 x 6 in. Private collection.

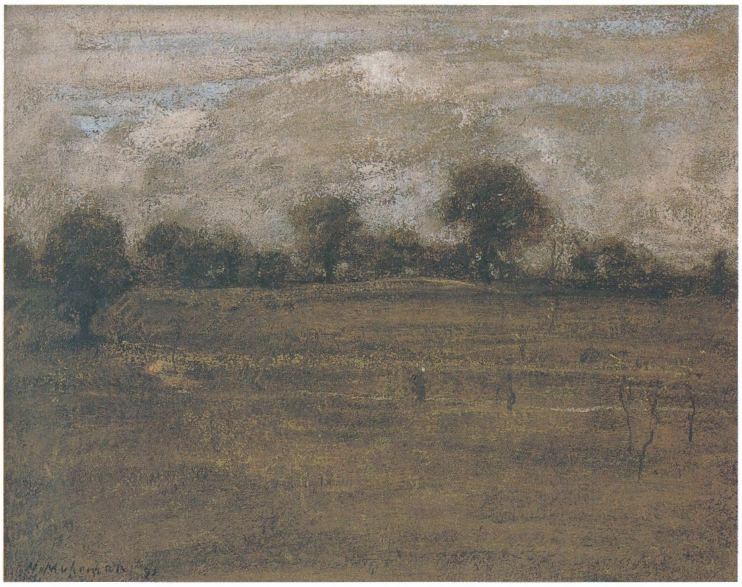


Fig. 3.15. Henry Muhrman, *Hampstead Heath*, 1891. Pastel, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

smokestack of the tugboat, using a judicious touch of white gouache to hint at released steam. A fellow Munich artist, John Henry Twachtman, was creating similar waterfront scenes in oil at this time upon his return to New York. Both Currier and Muhrman, employing "the science of tones" in radical fashion, were challenging the traditional watercolor mode, bringing on a watershed in American art. In 1882, de Kay again singled out Muhrman's contribution in the American Watercolor Society exhibition, noting that in one watercolor, "The local tone reaches its height... Mr. Muhrman is one of the few in whose work one feels sentiment and thought struggling through. His pictures have the fine reserve that characterizes much of the best work."[10]

Muhrman went on to play an important, if largely forgotten role in the advancement of American art. Like Currier and other progressive artists, he was frustrated by poor sales in America and ultimately chose to return to Europe in 1882, settling in London between 1884 and 1898, and finishing out his career in Meissen, Germany. In London he specialized in pastels, which were close in character to the sketch-like and expressive work of Whistler whose pastels were often exhibited with Muhrman's at the New English Art Club and The International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers. Nevertheless, his reputation as a leading figure among the avant-garde of his day remained strong in American art circles. Muhrman showed regularly in major American exhibitions and his pastels were admired by critics at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 where they were awarded a medal. Among these works were *Hampstead Heath*, 1891 (fig. 3.15), and *View of Highgate*, 1892 (fig. 3.16). In 1901, Muhrman was honored with a gold medal at Dresden and another gold medal in 1904 at Saint Louis World's Fair. His reputation among modernists reached its height after 1900, when Whistler was revered as a modern master, and Muhrman's Munich-style bravura, somber tonalities, and symbolist ambiguity of form fit the temper of the times (see his *Horse and Cart*, 1892, fig. 3.17). The American painter Arthur B. Davies regularly visited and consulted with Muhrman when he was in London and included his work in the American section of the Armory Show of 1913, by which time Muhrman was considered a veteran modernist.

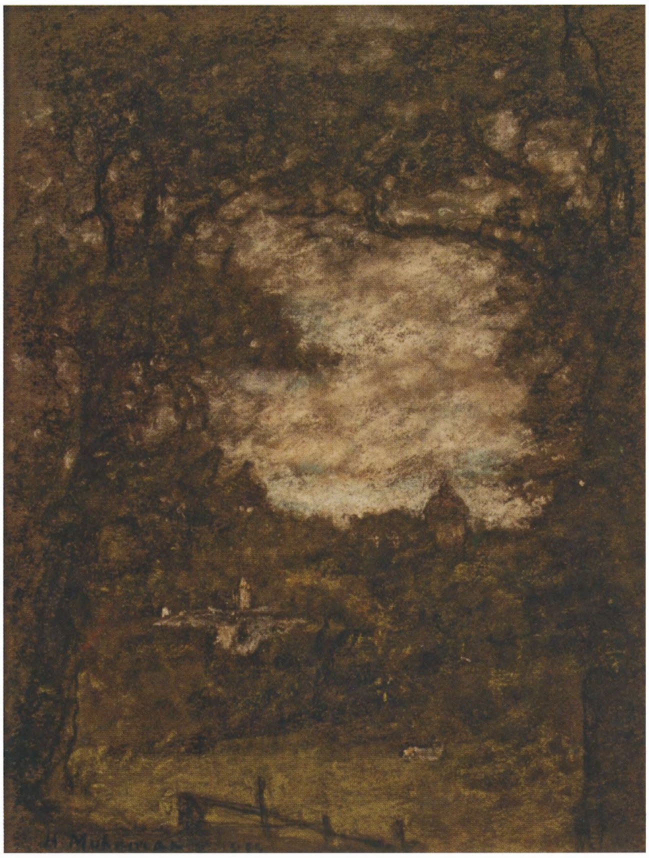


Fig. 3.16. Henry Muhrman, *View of Highgate*, 1892. Pastel, 10 x 8 in. Private collection.

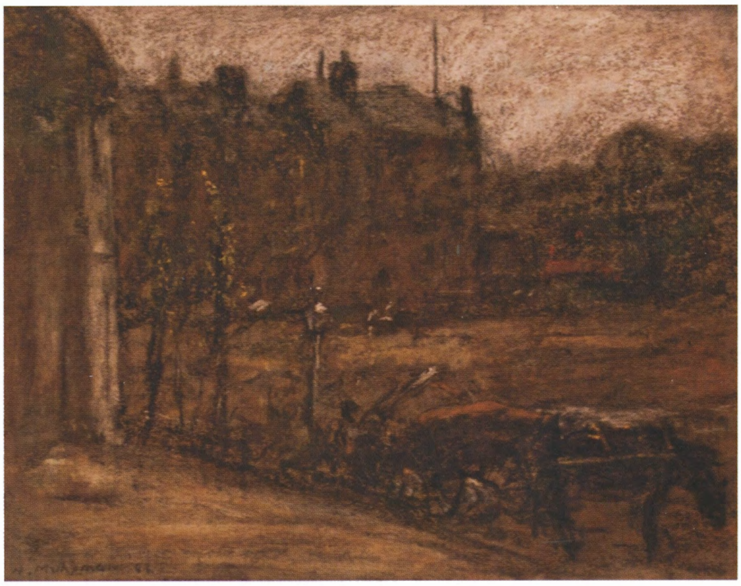


Fig. 3.17. Henry Muhrman, *Horse and Cart*, 1892. Pastel, 8 x 11 in. Private collection.

Currier and Winslow Homer

Before 1879, Winslow Homer had been considered one of the most advanced of the watercolorists with his sketchlike and broad effects, and occasional technical daring. With Currier and Muhrman's expressive Munich style providing a new benchmark, Homer's adherence to genre and narrative meant his means and ends suffered a disjunction, and the artist's attempts to be more modern within a traditional context could, to some critics, appear ungainly. To a modern eye, Currier's watercolors are thoroughly modern; style and subject merge seamlessly. Currier's handling of the medium—his indulgence of watercolor's runny, messy, serendipitous freedom—was the wave of the future. Homer's realistic watercolors of farm maids and rural pursuits, though of great beauty and charm, seem static and careful in comparison; they retain the Victorian love of narrative, along with the use of body color for detail and characterization, verging on brilliant illustration.

Currier showed his watercolors again in the American Watercolor Society exhibitions of 1880 and 1881, slowly gathering grudging praise from some quarters and extravagant praise from enlightened critics like de Kay. The artist was rapidly becoming a guiding light for ambitious American watercolorists, encouraging artists to do away with the use of body color, or gouache, in favor of a more pure, brilliant, and transparent use of color. Homer, in contrast, struggled in de Kay's eyes, the critic alternately praising and disdaining Homer for his "indifferent and inane canvases," and for his allegiance to genre. Homer, in turn, responded with the most brilliant, free, and evocative watercolors of his career to date, his Gloucester Harbor sunsets and nocturnes of 1880, including *Sailboat and Fourth of July Fireworks*, 1880 (fig. 3.18), in which the artist drew on many of the same technical and expressive effects Currier had displayed in the American Watercolor Society's 1879 exhibition. Homer had produced these free-form watercolors by isolating himself on Ten Pound Island in Gloucester Habor and immersing himself in the experience of sea and sky and the effects of light. When first shown in Boston, these pure landscapes, or marines, drew mixed reviews, critics finding "freshness and vigor of his intellectual methods," and "frank and hasty impressions of striking effect." A review noted that Homer's tonal values were too highly keyed and not in relative harmony.[11]

At the 1881 American Watercolor Society exhibition, de Kay praised the Gloucester marines but dismissed Homer's figurative work. "Mr. Homer does not shine this year with his figures. Some remarkably bold marine sketches are here; one or two among them have his old raciness and vigor. But the sketches in which a certain young New-England woman appears are seriously marred by the presence of that damsel." After further excoriating Homer's weak drawing, de Kay turns to Currier. "Mr. Frank Currier has again sent from Munich a number of landscapes, wood interior and cloudy skies, painted with astonishing breadth. If he has not fulfilled the promise he showed several years ago, he does exhibit improvement, in mechanical execution."[12] Two weeks later, de Kay again praises Currier and chides Homer. "Mr. Currier has one picture in the corridor ... which yields to no piece here in beauty, and

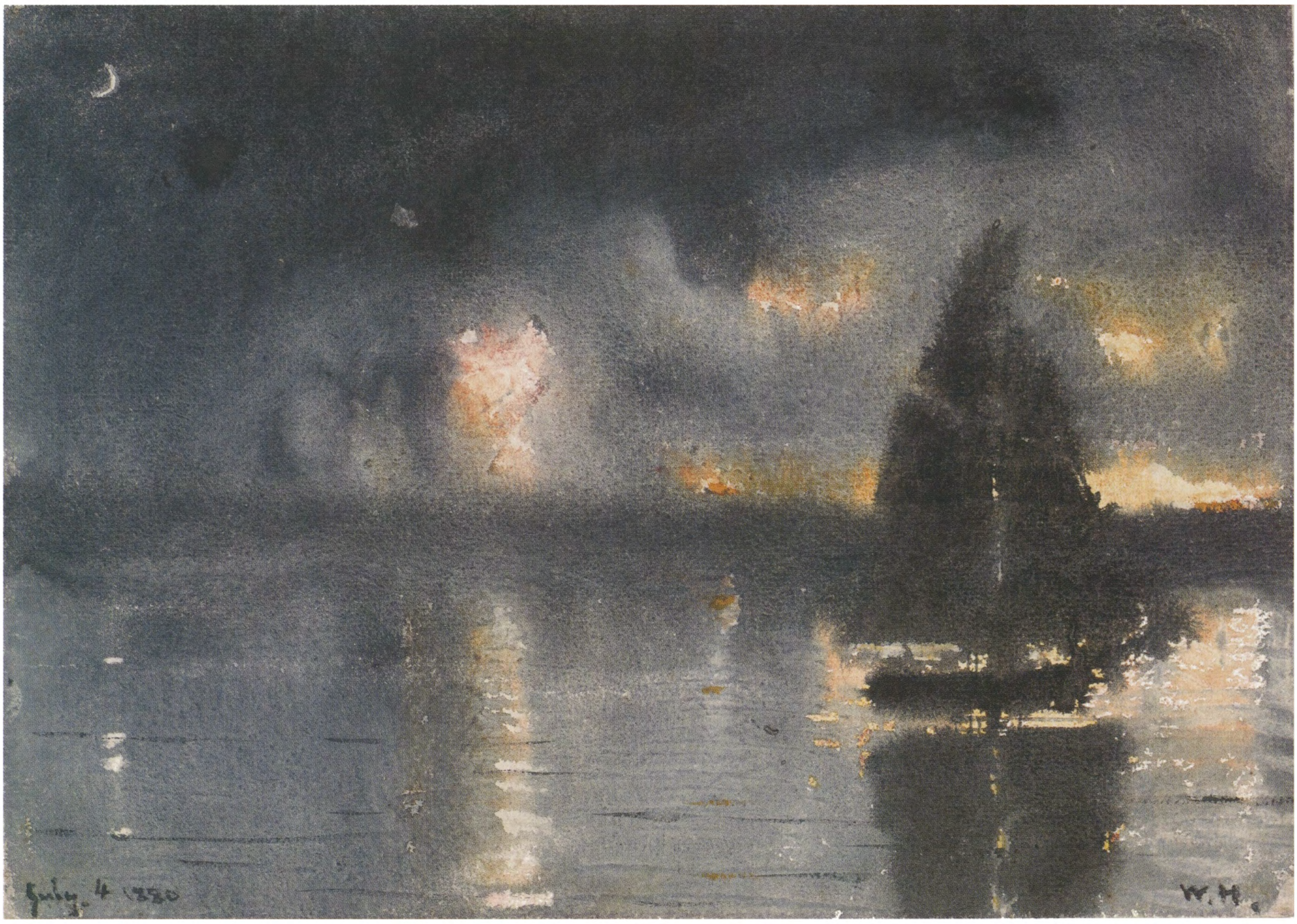


Fig. 3.18. Winslow Homer, *Sailboat and Fourth of July Fireworks*, 1880. Watercolor and white gouache on white wove paper, 9⅝ x 13¹¹⁄₁₆ in. Harvard Art Museum, bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop, 1943.305.

quite outpaces the other impressionist landscapes he has sent over. Some of the latter are like parallel and slightly interlaced skeins of worsted of different colors stretched across a sky; the ingenuity with which these resolve themselves into clouds, sunset, and distant hills is amusing ... the result is a landscape and evening sky of great simplicity and depth of beauty."[13] De Kay then proceeds to damn Homer with faint praise for his many offerings and undo eccentricity. "There is a note of desperation in the bad drawing, crude contrasts and ill-judged composition in some of his 23 pictures. They look like the work of a man who has said to himself I must make an impression by numbers, since I cannot by quality. Yet it has always been the quality, not the quantity, of his pictures which has given Mr. Homer the high rank in art which he holds. How unfortunate and ill-advised it is, then, to see him harm his own reputation by throwing in sketches that are unworthy of his name! Nevertheless, of the two traits—dullness or desperation—will not a charitable public be sure to prefer the later?"[14]

Other critics weighed in, often directly comparing Homer and Currier. Both were disparaged for their innovations. One called Currier's work "the crowning atrocity of impressionism ... wild chaos of mud and bedraggled colors drawn across the paper as though the painter had dropped his palette upon it."[15] Another critic found Homer's 1880 sheets "almost as eccentric as those of Mr. Currier."[16] Earl Shinn, one of the most perceptive critics of his day, appreciated both Homer and Currier and compared them favorably. Shinn wrote in *Art Amateur* that he found Currier's watercolors conveyed "the full passion and delight of a color impression derived straight from Nature, with no time allowed for the cooling off of the sentiment into definition and calculation, these drawings, warm and loyal as strains of music, tell their story as musical notes do, in vibrations and sympathies."[17] Shinn, a trained artist who had worked with Arthur Bridgman in Brittany in the 1870s, noted Currier's use of color to express emotion, without dependence on identifiable subject matter or recourse to studious detail.

An incisive—and partial—critic of Homer, Mariana Van Rensselaer, found herself dismayed and puzzled as she struggled to appreciate the new, or possibly aberrant, Homer. "It is hard to confess that one can take no pleasure in work that one yet knows—and, indeed *sees* to be powerful and original...."[18] Time would soften Van Rensselaer's perturbations about this revolutionary moment in the development of American modernism. Ten years later in 1889, looking back on the 1879

American Watercolor Society exhibition in which Currier's "color studies of stormy sunset skies" so enthralled the jury, she contrasted the strengths of Homer and Currier: "In comparing them one saw the difference between a natural colorist like Currier and a vigorous artist like Homer who, although he could make himself felt through color, did not handle it as though born to this sole end. Currier's drawings, in spite of their great breadth and hurrying dash of method, were far more suave in tone, more subtle in suggestion, more harmonious, more beautiful; and they were also more skillful and refined in execution."[19]

Contemporary critics recognized just how much had been at stake in the 1879 watercolor exhibition, and the watershed it represented for American art. A critic for the *Sun* wrote in 1881, how in 1878, "a wild Munich-American comet ... projected itself ... into our peaceful water-color system, with a train of astounding pictures. J. Frank Currier's broadly and transparently painted 'impressionist' watercolors made a sensation, and the exhibition at which they appeared was the most disputatious in the [Water Color] society's history."[20] The reviewer noted the contrast between Currier's fluid and transparent washes of color and the challenge they posed to the tight and controlled use of opaque color in the work of the American artists. "They were hung side by side with elaborate, brilliant, and effective pictures, painted throughout in solid body color, and while they were incoherent, meaningless, and in some sense preposterous exploits, at the same time they possessed a quality of their own that commended them at once. They were opposed to the dead, sunken enamel of the former pure, transparent color, vitalized by the grain of the paper and full of delicate and fortuitous gradations of tone," and they revolutionized the painting of watercolor in America. "Mr. Currier has had his effect; last year's exhibition [1880] had more pure color in it than all the preceding ones, and in the present display the opaque method is in a hopeless minority...."[21]

William Brownell, writing in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1880, noted the impact of Currier's watercolors. "The water colors he sent here in the winter of 1878–79 made a sensation. They became the subject of endless discussion and may almost be said to have divided 'art circles' into two hostile parties. It was contended on the one hand that they were wonderful examples of the way in which an impressionist, nobly careless of details and bent only on the representation of the spirit of nature rather than her botanical forms, can succeed in the truest fidelity. On the other, it was argued that nothing could be made out of them, that they were mere daubs and that the only landscape which could in the faintest way resemble them was that of which one caught glimpses from the window of an express train. "'The ayes' had it very clearly, in our view, Mr. Currier's 'impressions' were masterly at a proper distance. The fatal trouble with them was that they were horribly ugly. That is the difficulty with all of Mr. Currier's work; it is the difficulty with his genius...."[22]

De Kay, too, looking back from the distance of a decade in 1891, recalled the impact of Currier. "How many years ago was it that Mr. Currier used to send to the water-color exhibitions at New York his strange ecstasies in color, out of which a benevolent public was expected to evolve, by a special cultivation of eye and imagination, the shapes of clouds, trees, houses, and woods?"[23]

It may be that the mixed reviews of Homer's work in the late 1870s, especially the radical new criticism that dismissed narrative and called for a distinctive American style, putting a premium on sentiment and decorative poetry, caused Homer to abandon New York for Gloucester, then England, and eventually to settle in Maine at Prout's Neck. There, Homer could rethink his artistic strategies. The result was the creation of his masterpiece marines of the 1890s, many painted in late afternoon or evening in which he indulged tonal harmonies as never before. These late seascapes both exalted nature's power and fury and displayed all the formal innovations the critics had demanded back in the late 1870s: an art expressive, decorative, and evocative of the spirit of the American scene.

Currier's Oils, Pastels, and Charcoals

Currier, though embraced by the sophisticates and his fellow artists, could sell almost none of his watercolors—and sold virtually nothing in his lifetime. With no financial or professional incentive to return to the United States, and plagued by bouts of depression, he remained in Germany and only returned to Boston toward the end of his life, by which time he had all but quit working as an artist. Currier's landscape oils, perhaps not quite as radical as his work on paper and less influential in terms of frequency of exhibition, were, nonetheless, extraordinary and forceful works. Currier's love of the tactile feel and exuberance in the rich textures of the oil medium is manifest in *Two Trees,* circa 1880 (fig. 3.19); the work verges on pure expressionism as the thinned oil pigment is brushed and splattered and punched onto the canvas surface in an inspired improvisation, with all the freedom and dash that marked his watercolors. A remark of Currier's recounted by a friend seems apropos: "When I have my canvas covered I like to wallow around in paint."[24]

This sensuous exuberance in merging color into color on the canvas, the signature style of the Munich School, also appears to have infused Currier's pastels and charcoal wash drawings of the 1880s with an expressionistic fervor. In his pastels and charcoal washes some of Currier's most glorious and heartfelt effects are fully achieved. *Landscape #12,* circa 1882–83 (fig. 3.20), refines and modulates the expressive gestural impulse of Munich to portray a quieter, more pensive mood. The Schleissheim

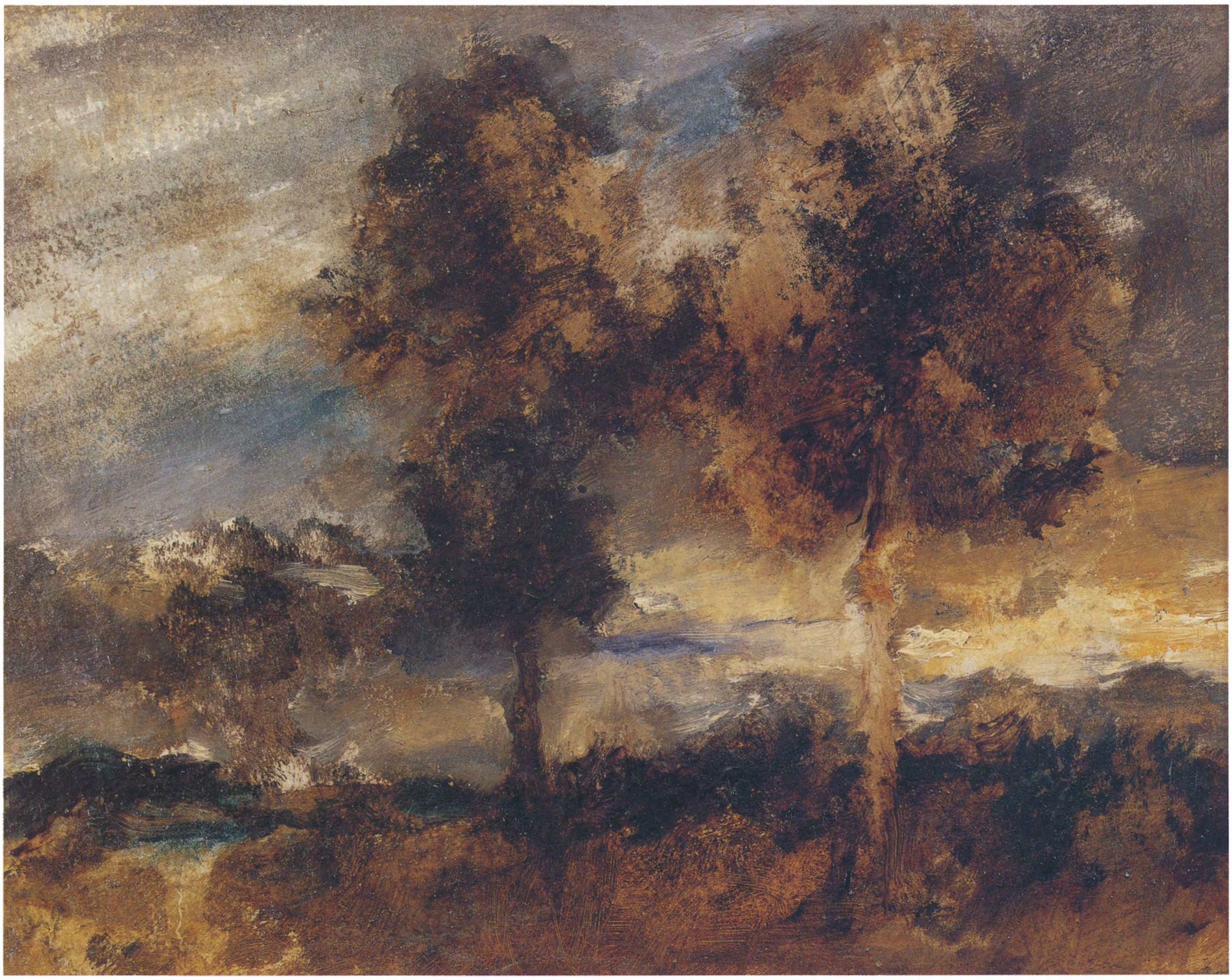


Fig. 3.19. J. Frank Currier, *Two Trees,* c. 1880. Oil on board, 9½ x 12 in. Private collection.

pastels and charcoal washes, such as *Road to Schlesissheim,* circa 1880 (fig. 3.21), are almost exclusively of dawn and dusk with silhouetted poplars against light-flickering skies. The rendering of muted tones is both precise and spontaneous: the atmosphere breathes in the way Whistler's Nocturnes of Venice exude a palpable atmosphere. Currier was fascinated by the soft, mellow envelope of air that blends and intensifies planes of fading color. Like many American artists he found the cloudy light of Europe more congenial than the flat, broad, and intense light of midday America (another reason Tonalists on their return to America preferred times of dawn and dusk on their home ground). Currier was attuned to the subtlest nuances of the middle tones, the broad relationships of earth to sky, and the transitions of soft light over a fine design of trees and rooftops. Like Whistler, he used toned papers to establish unity of effect and to harmonize the whole. In *Landscape #59,* 1882 (fig. 3.22), the jagged patches of darker clouds in the sky are exposed areas of brown paper, thrust to the picture plane to add drama, yet delicately conceived—the radical technique concealed—so as to seem a natural manifestation. Just as Whistler made the fogs of the Thames his own, Currier turned the misty rain-softened clouds of the Bavarian countryside into luminous atmospheric microclimates of the mind. According to his biographer, Currier's emphasis on the middle tonal range, like that of fellow Tonalists Inness, Whistler, and Dwight Tryon, "exemplifies his exceptional tonal sense, for Currier was intuitive in his feeling for those nuances that lie between the positive hues. Here also his painting is closely related to music, for a true sense of tone is temperamental and does not depend upon sharp eyes or ears but rather upon a supersensitive spirit."[25]

The mercurial Currier quit painting in 1893, once the inspiration had deserted him. In 1898 he moved back to Boston, a place much changed from what he had known thirty years before. Except for occasional exhibitions of his pastels, Currier remained uninvolved in art. After a loss in the stock market crash of 1907, which he took very hard, Currier, suffering from recurring bouts of depression—an issue since his youth—threw himself under the wheels of a train in 1909.

Currier's impact on American art was profound, if short-circuited by his failures to market himself or make concessions

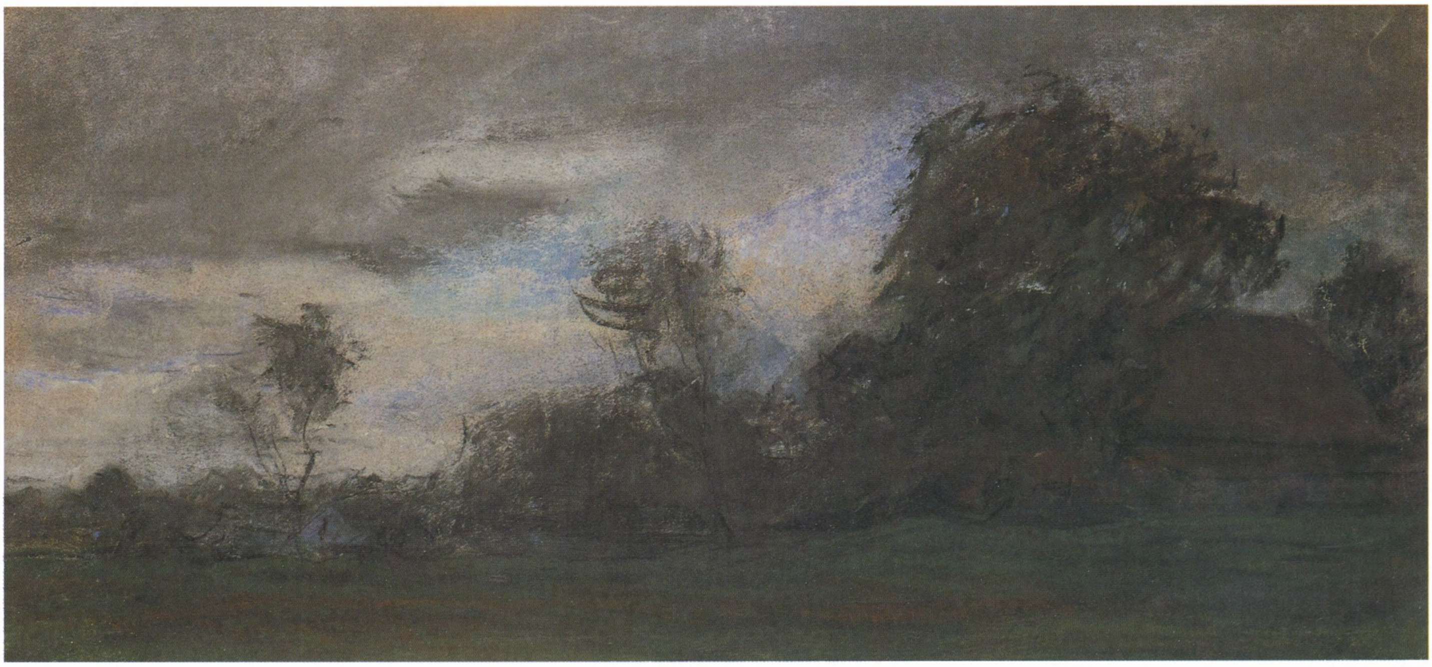


Fig. 3.20. J. Frank Currier, *Landscape # 12*, c. 1882–83. Pastel, 8 x 17 in. Private collection.

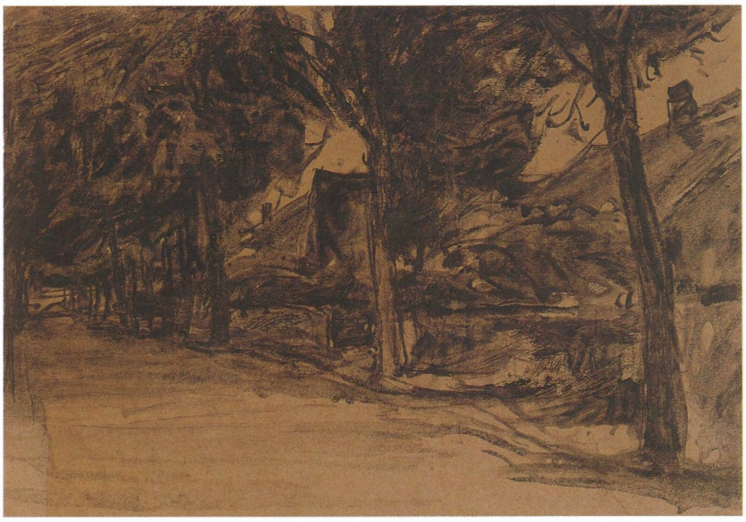


Fig. 3.21. J. Frank Currier, *Road to Schleissheim*, c. 1880. Charcoal wash, 9½ x 12 in. Private collection.

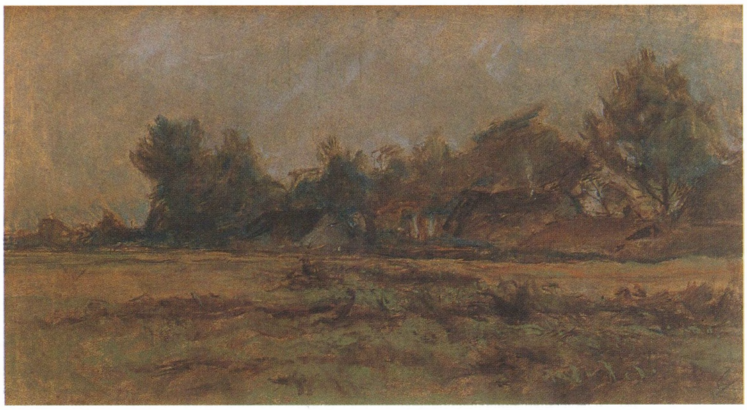


Fig. 3.22. J. Frank Currier, *Landscape # 59*, 1882. Pastel, 12½ x 23¾ in. Private collection.

to public taste. Writing in 1901 in his *History of American Art*, Sadakichi Hartmann called Currier a true colorist. "He was a man who seemed destined to become one of the greatest painters of his generation, and who, after all, was satisfied with simple studies in which his artistic temperament could make itself felt merely though color and clever brushwork. His influence on contemporary art can hardly be over-rated, as his studio, within the ruined walls of a convent, at Polling, was always thronged with devoted pupils and disciples of his brilliant style."[26] Currier was a painter's painter. It is no wonder that William Merritt Chase had a collection of eleven paintings by Currier and that the few sales in Currier's lifetime were probably to other artists. It is also apparent that Currier's radical style, which incorporated the central tenets of Tonalism—the sensuous feeling-filled manipulation of color on the surface of the paper or canvas for its own sake, pictorial values as opposed to representation, proved the most controversial aspect of his style when confronting the ossified genre subjects of the American Watercolor Society, as well as the detailed and tame realism of the older Hudson River School in the late 1870s. After Currier, the New York art world was never the same: expressive feeling, along with abstract and decorative design, became the essential quality of innovative American art.

John Henry Twachtman (1853–1902)

Trained in Munich, John Henry Twachtman (fig. 3.23) was an artist very much of Currier's stripe, a born landscape painter who exalted in cool and luxuriant tones and who sought his own way, making few concessions to prevailing taste. Although Twachtman would discard much of the electric paint handling of his Munich days, much of the tenebrous—and often mysterious—tonality of that period remained a touchstone of his later work. Twachtman, too, a consummate craftsman with paint and a master of the medium's (as well as pastel's) decorative possibilities. Like Currier, he would endure enormous personal frustration, encountering resistance from critics and the public throughout his life.

Twachtman studied briefly with Duveneck in their hometown of Cincinnati in 1875, and subsequently Duveneck encouraged his promising student to return with him to Munich. The early work from Twachtman's Munich period emphasizes the relationships between shape, tone, and line—in keeping with the vigorous realism espoused by Leibl and later reinforced by Currier in Polling, which Twachtman visited in 1877 and 1878. It was on a sojourn to Venice with Duveneck and Chase in 1877–78 that Twachtman's art first took flight—more than a year before Whistler changed the course of art with his revolutionary pastels and etchings of Venice. Like Whistler, Twachtman scoured the city for nontraditional subject matter and employed the free and fluid, broadly brushed style that Currier had used in his Polling landscapes. *Ship and Dock, Venice*, circa 1878 (fig. 3.24), display's Twachtman's supple paint manipulation and use of dark foreground tonalities. The high vantage point and mundane subject matter are unusual for the time, and serve to train the eye on the drying sails in the middle ground and the glints of light on the distant bell tower. Realistic, yet employing intriguing abstract elements, the work is a remarkable accomplishment for a twenty-five-year-old artist.

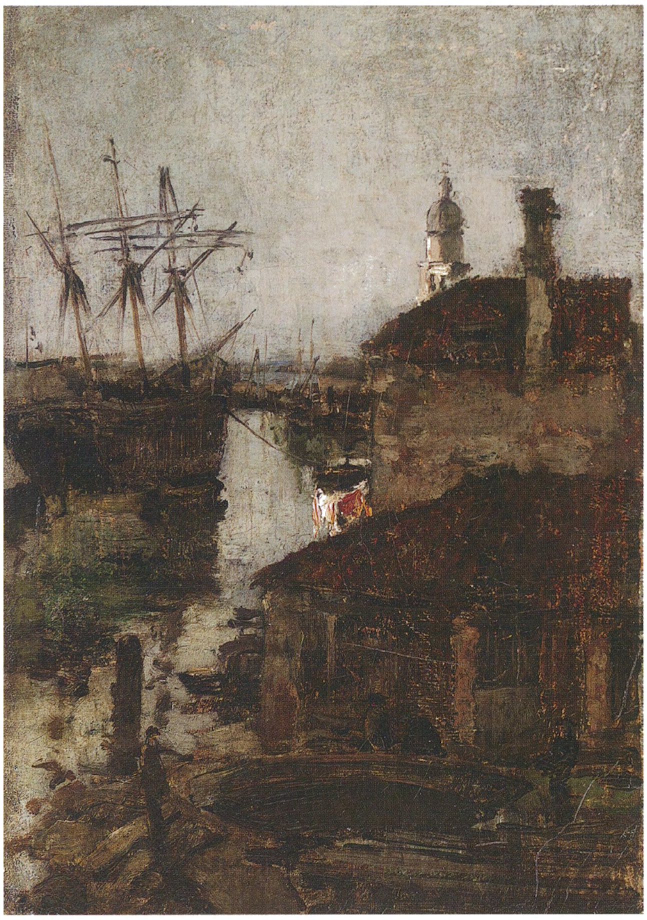


Fig. 3.24. John Henry Twachtman, *Ship and Dock, Venice*, c. 1878. Oil on panel, 14½ x 10½ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

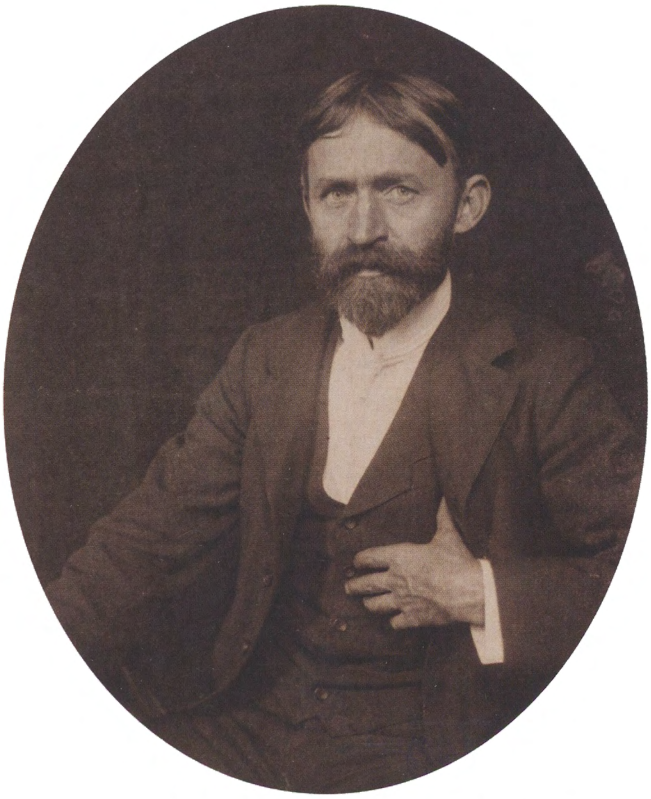


Fig. 3.23. John Henry Twachtman photographed c.1900 by Gertrude Käsebier. Platinum print, 5.9 x 4.7 in. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

When Twachtman's—and Duveneck's—Venetian works were shown at the first exhibition of the radical Society of American Artists in 1878, a year before Currier's watercolors exploded on the New York art scene in February 1879, Charles de Kay made them the focus of his second review of the exhibition. Apparently the work of these Munich men had arrived late for the opening. In his first review, de Kay had addressed issues of paint handling, sketchlike quality, and lack of smooth finish, approaches that perplexed American critics and the art public as younger European-trained Americans began showing in New York. What seemed "unfinished," de Kay assured his readers, trying to lay the way for the Munich style of bravura paint handling, was really just the personal expression of the young artists. "To a person accustomed to the smooth finish characteristic of academy exhibitions, the presence of so many pictures blocked in quickly, and even rudely, on the canvas may seem a mannerism, but a conclusion of that kind results from a prejudice which is very natural under the circumstances."[27] De Kay notes the speed and dash of Duveneck's portraits and the sober handling of his Venetian subject. But he saves most of his praise for Twachtman, observing that artist's portrayal of Venice as distinct from the typical hackneyed view. He contrasts Twachtman's rendering of the lagoon city with those of European artists who emphasize bright, coruscating light. "Where the former give up most of effects produced by the contrasts of light and shade, seeking to put brilliancy against brilliancy, and light upon light, Twachtman holds to his Munich teachings and keeps such contrasts far more steadily in view. The result is a very powerful style of picture, which looks well at a great distance. At the conventional range of 'three times the width of the frame' the paintiness of the canvas becomes too strong. He manages to inspire the belief that there is thought and life behind his mahl-stick."[28] De Kay's reaction anticipates the response to Currier's watercolors a year later, when the critic would attempt to educate his readers on the pleasures of sketchlike handling. Critic Mariana Van Rensselaer, who had struggled with Currier and Homer's looser, sketchlike watercolors around the same time, was positively disposed to Twachtman, finding the Venetian images to be "landscape studies that are bold, strong, and artistic, full of promise in many ways."[29]

Twachtman's Venetian work did not entirely escape the kind of criticism leveled at Currier, whose oil portraits of the late 1870s were savaged by the critics and labeled "slapdash," "affected," and "sensationalistic"[30] Because Twachtman specialized in landscape, he avoided the opprobrium heaped on the figurative works of Currier, Duveneck, and Chase, which were often singled out as epitomizing the excesses of the Munich School. Critics found the so-called realism of Leibl, interpreted by the Munich men, as verging on unreality, more tricks of manipulation than truth. The most widely expressed criticism was that the Munich painters were too dark, intent on capturing the heavily varnished feel of the old masters—a proclivity that one critic dismissed by reminding his readers that the yellowed surface of the old masters had more to do with aging varnish and less with artistic intent.[31] Dark tonal values, whether truthful, affected, or a legitimate response by the artist to his perception of reality, continued to be an issue for Twachtman as they would for many Tonalists in the formative years of the movement. In short order, Twachtman's affinity for the cloudy saturated atmosphere of Europe, especially Venice, tended to lighten the artist's palette, and this response to natural light continued to influence his American landscapes, beginning with his New York harbor scenes after his move to New York in 1879 and his subsequent landscapes of Cincinnati. Like so many American expatriates, Twachtman found the overcast conditions, similar to the pearly light characteristic of European skies along the northern coasts of France and Holland, most conducive to the formal rendering of natural forms and their decorative arrangement.

The Local Landscape as National Art

The adoption of local landscapes by Twachtman during his early years back in America—as was the case with Muhrman—was very much in keeping with the period's tendency to treat American everyday scenes as subject matter, an approach considered both patriotic and appropriate for a national art. This trend, encouraged by critics, had multiple benefits: the artist did not need to travel to the distant West or to Europe for picturesque or exotic subject matter, and the depiction of native ground, especially when it was nearby the artist's home or studio, endowed the work with deeper feeling based on enduring attachments, and ultimately allowed the artist to explore multiple versions of scenes or subjects under various lighting conditions, times of day, or seasons. Such serial subjects represented a proto-modernist development similar to Monet's experiments with multiple renditions of Rouen Cathedral, haystacks, lines of poplars, and later his beloved lily pads in his garden at Giverny. Both Twachtman and Currier would ultimately produce serial paintings of their favorite haunts—Currier at Polling and Schleissheim, and Twachtman in his backyard in Greenwich and its environs—as would a score of Tonalist painters like Charles Warren Eaton, Dwight Tryon, and J. Alden Weir, to name only a few. Critics applauded the trend, raising the possibility that a distinctly American style of art might be generated by applying European technical advances to American subject matter.

William MacKay Laffan, a friend of Twachtman and fellow member of the Tile Club, an artist's social club, suggested as much in an article in 1880 for the *American Art Review*, "The Material of the American Landscape." In the article, which references Twachtman and his paintings of New York and Venice, Laffan suggests that the American artist with foreign training at his fingertips should "imitate those masters in seeking the truth for himself, and in learning how best to convey a sincere and faithful impression of objects, not necessarily as they would have appeared to this or that master, but as he feels that they do appear and do reveal themselves to himself. [The artist should] be concerned with the things whereof we have the best and truest knowledge, whereof the images are implanted in our minds and which we unconsciously love and cling to from mere association and familiarity. . . . The forms of our trees, the color of our vegetation, the moods of our skies, every physical manifestation of our daily life, are things understood by us and fitted to us and with which we are in full accord and sympathy."[32]

This cri de coeur for an American art based on the American landscape would be repeated by American critics throughout the 1880s and beyond. Inness, of course, had firmly established the principle of depicting the "civilized landscape," and his growing fame only substantiated the critics' pleas. The essence

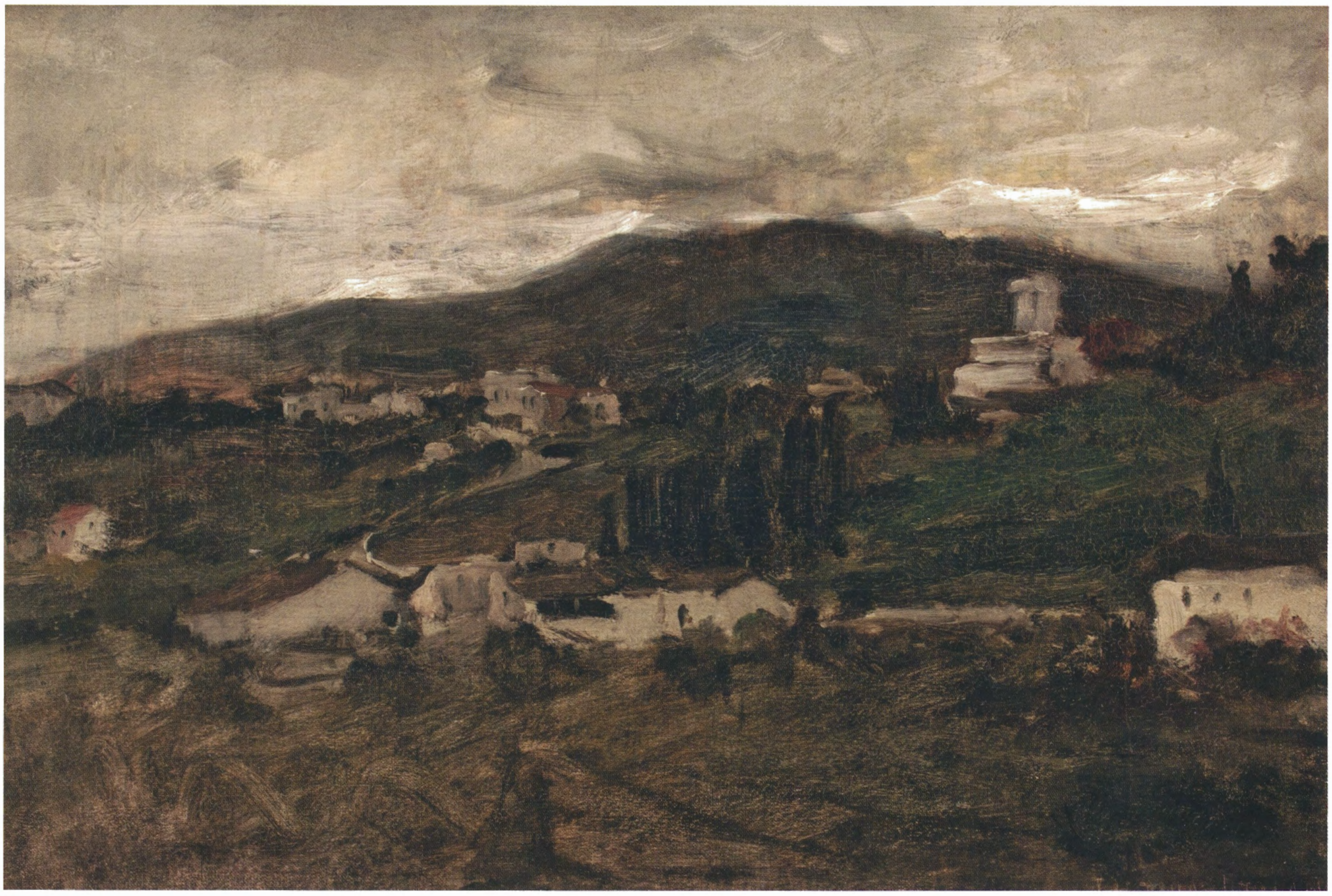


Fig. 3.25. John Henry Twachtman, *Florence, San Miniato*, 1880–81. Oil on canvas, 13 x 19 in. Private collection.

of Laffan's call, tantamount to a manifesto—for a landscape art that expresses the spirit of place interpreted through the stabled soul and temperament of the artist—would serve as the keystone of the early success and later triumph of the Tonalist movement. As will be seen, many of the American expatriates would take on Laffan's advice to return home and paint their homeland—"the forms of our trees . . . the moods of our skies"—and would translate to them the feel for the milky gray hues of the European climate, with which they had become so familiar during their years in Brittany, Bavaria, and England.

Twachtman's talents and modernist sympathies resulted in his early membership in both the Society of American Artists and the Tile Club, a loose group of aesthetically minded artists who went around together on field trips for camaraderie and self-promotion. Twachtman slowly shed elements of his Munich style—especially the somber palette and bravura handling; in later years he would decry his early use of a dark tonal palette and complain that he learned nothing about drawing in Munich. Early on his second trip to Europe, teaching with Duveneck in Florence, Twachtman painted *Florence, San Miniato*, 1880–81 (fig. 3.25). The artist's full mastery, or near-transcendence of the Munich style, is displayed in his broad and fluid handling and the infinitely subtle transitions between landscape forms. Using a restricted range of dark olive greens, and jottings of gray, rust, and black, Twachtman has composed with activated brushstrokes of nearly calligraphic and rhythmic freedom a wintry hillside above Florence. The foreground has been lightened by wiping through the wet paint to reveal the lighter ground beneath, with no effort to disguise the method—serpentine wipe marks add to the energized surface, while details of stucco facades are dashed in with summary blotches of lighter pigment. A charged gray sky touched with pearl-white highlights is created with swipes of luscious impasto, setting off the hillside and enhancing the sense of inclement weather. The activated surface has an inherent beauty: the painting as art object and subjective expression has become a seamless whole. The technical adroitness and exuberant use of wet-into-wet paint has an uncanny resemblance to Currier's watercolors of Polling, which Twachtman may have witnessed firsthand in the field or seen at the American Watercolor Society in 1879.

A wedding trip to Holland in 1881, which included artist friend J. Alden Weir, exposed Twachtman to the low-lying, water-saturated landscapes around Dordrecht, and precipitated a radical shift in his art. The distinctive, soft, moisture-laden atmosphere had attracted artists for centuries, from the seventeenth-century Dutch masters to the nineteenth-century Hague School artists like Anton Mauve, who recorded the scintillating reflections and silvery tones of rivers, estuaries, and marshes. Second-generation Tonalists like Leonard Ochtman, Charles Warren Eaton, Henry Ward Ranger, Charles Platt, and Frederick W. Kost were drawn to this area by the dreamy stillness and quietude, the low spare horizons and enormous skies. A letter written by Weir gives an idea of the sensory impact of the experience: "We are in Holland! One can smell the salt air, and my how things sparkle and colors shine—a grassy slope is like an emerald; and all in low tone, the sky falling to a low horizon, the clouds skudding in flying skies, the atmosphere almost palpable to the eye as it might be to the sense of touch; no other sky is similar elsewhere; they may be thin and sparkling or transparent as in Italy or America; but here they have a breadth and solidity wholly their own—I don't know otherwise to describe it than palpable."[33] Twachtman and other expatriate Americans may well have been influenced by members of the Hague School, who sought, according to the Dutch critic J. van Santen Kolff, "to render an *atmosphere*; they give priority to tone rather than color. That is why they prefer to paint almost exclusively the effects of overcast weather; ... they have unveiled the poetry of gray."[34]

Back in his hometown of Cincinnati between 1881 and 1883, in the suburb of Avondale where he had grown up, Twachtman brought to these familiar settings a softened palette and a new, wispy restraint influenced by his European experience, as if memories of home, or even nostalgia for a neighborhood inexorably encroached on by the growth of the city were leading him to a more personal expression. He was painting his home turf through a maturing artistic temperament: nostalgic, serene, and very private, the way dreams are grasped at upon first waking. Here in Avondale, between 1880 and 1883, Twachtman developed and codified the expressive essentials of the Tonalist landscape. With the technical resources of the European tradition at his fingertips, he went to the human landscape in the environs of his home and created something radically new in American art.

Twachtman's Avondale landscapes, a number of which made their way into the early exhibitions of the Society of American Artists, offer an insight, not only into the pathbreaking work of a singular genius but also to the public receptivity to change, as critics and other artists first began to grudgingly acknowledge Twachtman's achievements, and then to appreciate his work's distinctive qualities—his sense of design and relish for subtle patterning, his increasing emphasis on tonal harmony and rhythm (what Charles de Kay called a "science of tones")—as a positive development in American landscape. A winter landscape in the 1882 Society exhibition, probably *Bloody Run*, 1882 (fig. 3.26), was praised by critics for being "strong and real," and "dealing with the most prosaic and local of themes ... that even such homely material may be wrought into satisfactory and, of course, quite original sorts of art."[35] A *New York World* critic praised Twachtman for developing his subject "from unpromising materials which no one had cared to touch before."[36] Critic Mariana Van Rensselaer, who had grappled with the profound modernity of expression in Currier's watercolors of 1879, heartily approved Twachtman's use of typical American scenes as the basis of his art, seeing in it a renewal of the American landscape tradition, drawing "its materials from immediate surroundings if it is to be truly vital and characteristic." Van Rensselaer added that it was not just the domestic subject that was crucial but that the artist

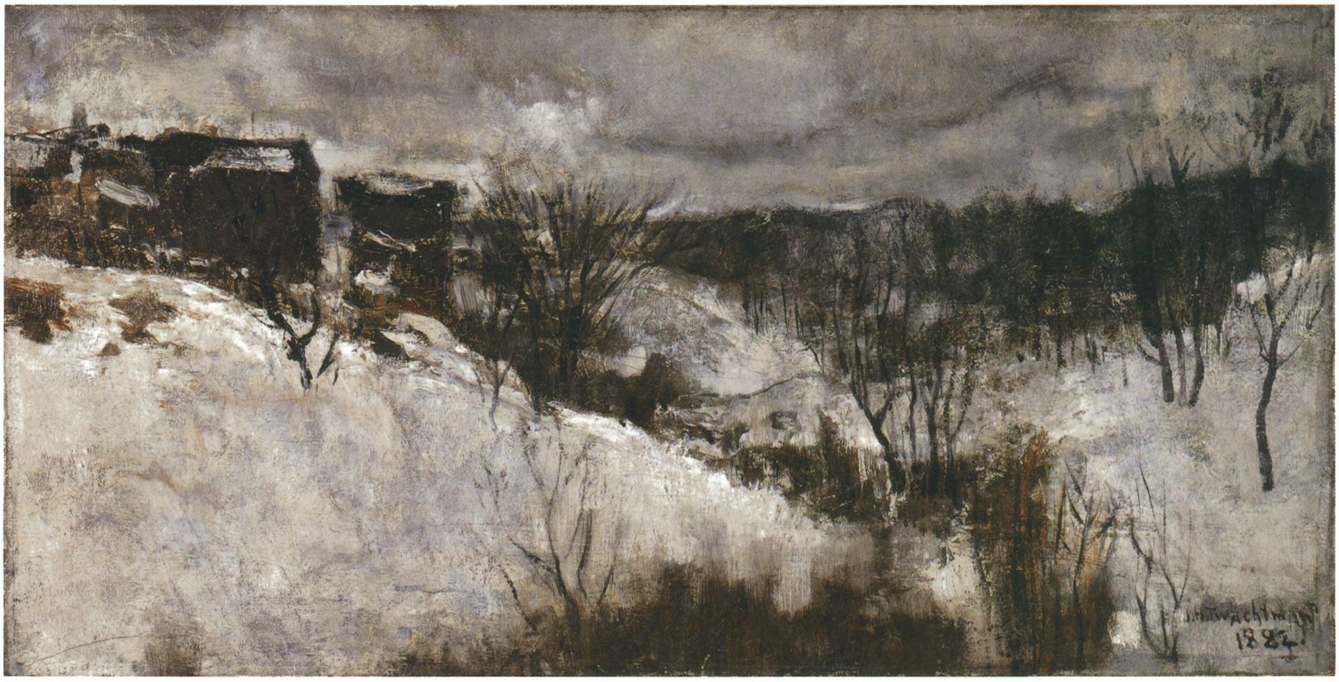


Fig. 3.26. John Henry Twachtman, *Bloody Run*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 12 x 24 in. Cincinnati Art Museum, gift of the Procter & Gamble Company.

could "clothe" his images with "artistic charm and poetry drawn from his own nature and his originality of brush."[37] Here again, echoing Laffan's call for localized subject matter, was the emergence of a critical consensus for an American landscape art based on the here and now, endowed with a new dignity, honesty, and truth by virtue, not of accurate reproduction per se but of the subjective investment of the artist in his subject. Critics of the society exhibitions of this early period seemed pleased that the Munich slapdash had faded, along with the darker "sooty" tonalities, replaced by "sweetness and light." At the same time, they praised the emergence of what one critic described as "a strong poetic impulse, struggling to express by color and line some great truths of the imagination."[38]

By the 1883 Society of American Artists exhibition, Twachtman was joined by the most advanced American landscape painters of the day. There were Inness and Wyant among the older generation, younger men like Hugh Bolton Jones and William Sartain recently back from Europe, and homegrown talents Albert Pinkham Ryder and J. Francis Murphy. All were beginning to demonstrate a more decorative abstract design in their landscapes, most likely influenced by Whistler, a trend that Twachtman also adopted. Like Currier, he was revered by his fellow artists as an innovator. Twachtman was certainly in the forefront of his generation in terms of the decorative or formal aspects of his work, the very best which was informed by breathtaking subtlety and rare expressive power. Within a matter of years, Twachtman had shed much of his Munich swagger for a style of quiet serenity, an approach and sensibility—Tonalist to the core—that would remain his favored mode for the rest of his life.

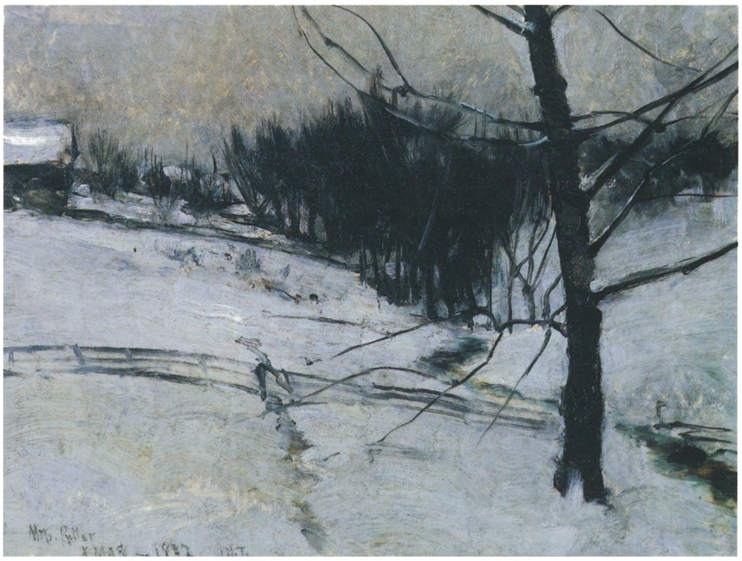


Fig. 3.27. John Henry Twachtman, *Snow Scene*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 12 1/16 x 16 1/16 in. Cincinnati Art Museum, Bequest of Louise Drude.

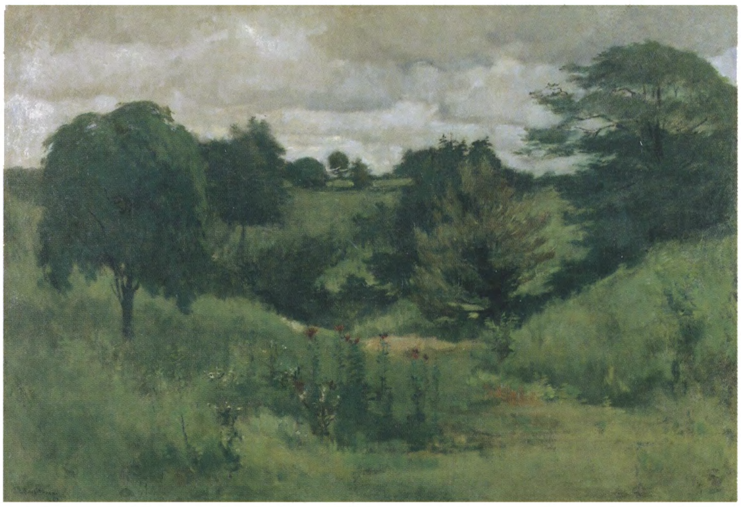


Fig. 3.28. John Henry Twachtman, *Dark Trees, Cincinnati*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 32 x 48 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

Twachtman's experimentation and radical departures, often featuring a flattening of his forms and employing expressive impasto, seem to have had no boundaries in these years. It is not known whether he was responding to the admonitions of critics, gaining insights from other artists like Inness, Whistler, and Murphy—all of whom exhibited with him in the Society of American Artists in the early 1880s—or if he was producing these paintings in relative isolation in Cincinnati, driven by an inner need to achieve a personal breakthrough. It may be that fellow Cincinnati—and Munich-trained—artist Henry Muhrman, who was back working and teaching in Cincinnati between 1880 and 1882, offered emotional support and prompted Twachtman's radical leanings. Twachtman's *Snow Scene*, 1882 (fig. 3.27), is a jewel-like modernistic expression, combining a schematic formalism with a finely registered tonality and a vivid freedom of brushwork. *Dark Trees, Cincinnati*, 1882 (fig. 3.28), demonstrates a classic balance and a meticulously constructed armature of tonal scaling that leads the eye in horizontal ascents into the heart of the scene, a majestic tree outlined by billowing silver-gray clouds. The meadow flowers in the foreground, the barest touches of relevant detail to anchor the eye, would soon be genetic markers for the Tonalist landscape, turning up in canvas after canvas in the 1880s.

It is probable that Twachtman's involvement with etching in these years influenced his painting. Small-scale etching (see *The Zatttere*, fig. 5.53) developed and refined his sense for schematic form and the use of minimal but telling detail, something he would have known from Whistler's etchings and pastels of Venice. The Avondale landscapes demonstrate the ways in which Twachtman moved from the stylistic gloom of his Munich days to a more natural atmospheric envelope, stressing the gray, diffuse, and even light of overcast days and winter's more sober hues. This American light is at once natural but also synthetic and utilitarian, the kind of cloudy light many returning Americans had become used to in European settings. The Americans found such subdued conditions attractive

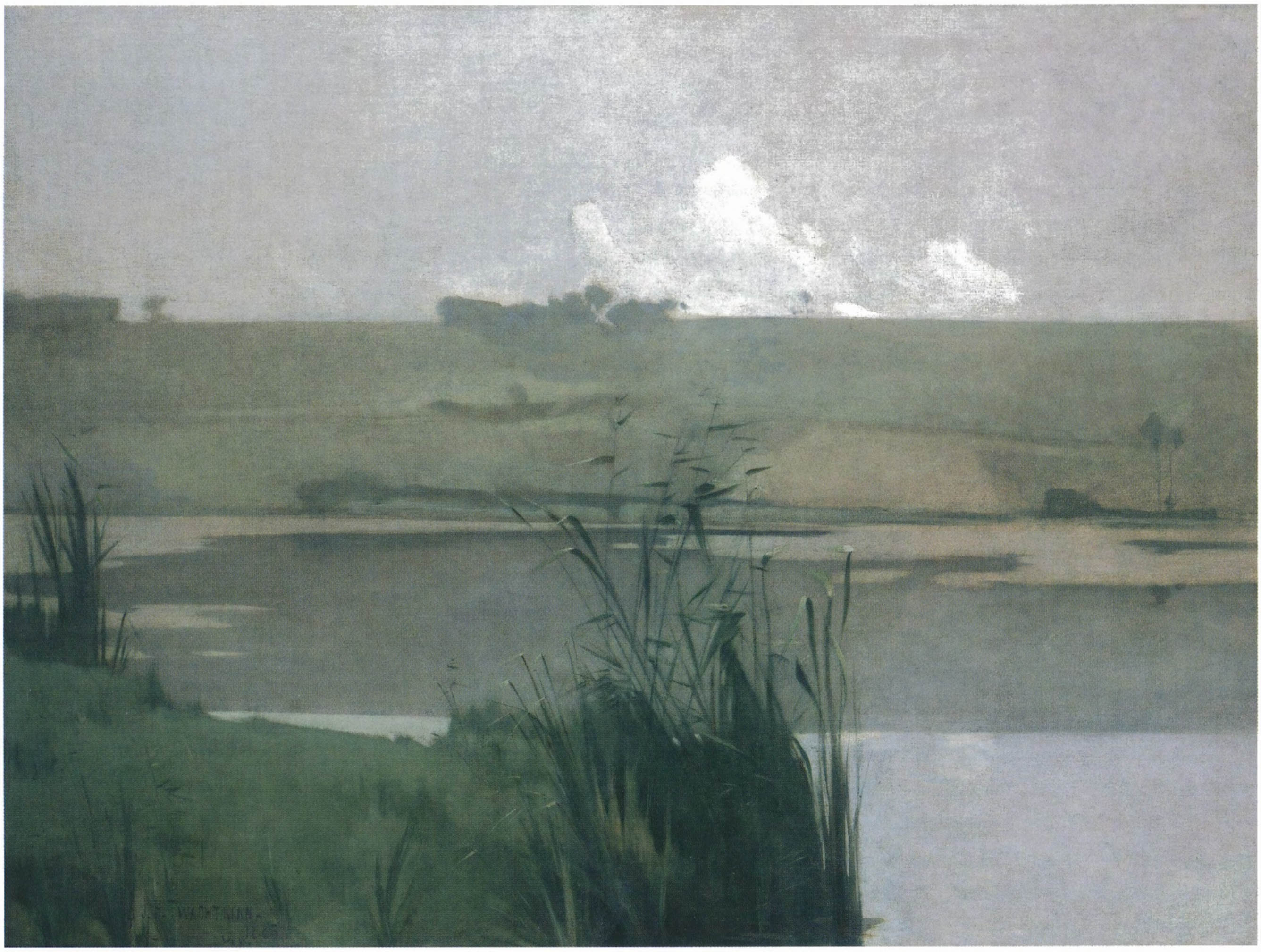


Fig. 3.29. John Henry Twachtman, *Arques-la-Bataille*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 60 x 78⅞ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Morris K. Jesup Fund, 1968.

because their evenness fixed values in the subjects, eliminated distracting—and changing—shadows, and elucidated the meticulous decipherment of related and graduated tones. Detailing and differentiating forms by depicting the interplay of tonal planes gave the Tonalist landscape a quiet and dreamy decorative beauty of surface that the artists treasured. Winter, autumn, dawn and dusk, and overcast days—a specifically American approximation of European weather conditions—became by choice or necessity the preferred lighting conditions for most Tonalist artists working in America. Twachtman, who belonged to the second generation of Tonalists, was one of the first returning artists to fully establish and utilize this mode.

Twachtman's determination to constantly push his art to a higher level was formidable. He returned to Europe in 1883 and spent two years studying in Paris at the Académie Julian under Gustave Boulanger (1824–88) and Jules-Joseph Lefebvre (1836–1911), and was one of the few Munich artists to broaden his training in Paris. He wanted to improve his drawing skills, in which he felt deficient, draftsmanship having been slighted in Munich for paint handling and emphasis on portraiture. His time spent on drawing the nude and then going into the French countryside to refine his landscape skills paid off in some of his finest and rarely repeated masterpieces. *Arques-la-Bataille*, 1885 (fig. 3.29), is unparalleled in American art for its refinement, elegance of design, and rarefied handling of tone. The muted greens, silvery grays, and vaporous whites are applied with such dexterity—much of the color has soaked into the fabric of the canvas—that tonal transitions between forms are nearly imperceptible. Clearly, Twachtman had seen or knew of Whistler's translucent landscapes; he integrated Japanese design elements by balancing his forms so as to create a kind of Zen-like equipoise of almost hypnotic intensity. His space recedes in ethereal planes of deliquescing halftones, a recessional that at once bleeds away into space and reads as horizontal designs spreading across the flat plane of the canvas. The foreground reeds show a deft calligraphic touch that may well be the happy result of two years' study of draftsmanship at the Académie Julian. Twachtman absorbed the visual glory of a riverine world and then reduced it to barest essentials, to graphic symbols—flat, soft-edged, organic and fluid—that radiate with a concentrated emotional power. "Thus is art," as Emerson put it, "a nature passed though the alembic of man."[39]

The discussion returns to Twachtman's later work in the following chapters as his influence grows and his stylistic repertoire expands to epitomize the preoccupations of the Tonalist movement.

William Gedney Bunce (1840–1916)

William Gedney Bunce was another important American expatriate painter of the Munich School (like Twachtman, Bunce studied widely) who made a specialty of Venetian marines. Bunce translated the Munich-style bravura and expressive handling of pigment—probably influenced by Currier—into a resplendent and inimitable vision of lagoon and sky that verges on pure abstraction; his grand and towering sunset skies, which often take up the major part of his marine compositions, emphasized the gestural display of paint handling and a true colorist's sheer exuberance in refined tonal variations. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Bunce was one of the few artists of his generation to serve in the Civil War. He fought with the First Connecticut Cavalry, was wounded in the leg, and so walked with a limp for the rest of his life. He first studied at The Cooper Union, and then with the Hudson River School artist William Hart in New York. Subsequently he trained with Andreas Achenbach in Munich and Paul Jean Clays in Brussels, and was part of the Duveneck circle in Munich and Venice, though hardly one of the "boys"—by 1880 he was forty and already a veteran artist. Like Twachtman, Bunce seems to have taken the various technical approaches of his teachers and developed his own tonal expressionist style. He spent twelve years studying and working in Europe, exhibiting as early as 1871 at the National Academy of Design, before returning to take a studio in New York in 1879 (Bunce and Twachtman had studios in the Benedick at 80 East Washington Square), where he became a member of the exclusive Tile Club and an early member of the Society of American Artists. By the early 1880s, Bunce was an established, respected, and perhaps slightly eccentric figure in American art circles, both at home and abroad. He had achieved success with his Venetian marines at the Paris Salons of the late 1870s, and given his birth date of 1840, was a good ten years senior to many of the younger men studying in Europe. Joseph Pennell recollected him fondly as a fixture among Duveneck's boys in Venice of the early 1880s, a slightly quirky and loveable character whom all admired. "Dear old Bunce, painting sunsets at sunrise and moonlights on cloudy days from his broken back 'gandler,' with, after forty years, about forty words of Italian, many of them naughty words."[40]

From the earliest days of the Society of American Artists, Bunce exhibited his Venetian pictures to great acclaim; in 1880 he sold one Venetian marine for a thousand dollars. In 1882, Charles de Kay noted, "Mr. William Gedney Bunce has three Venetian marines that make one wonder how he can do the same thing so often and do it so well. Venice has the fatal spell over her that used to be attributed to Rome. The painter who once allows himself to get bitten with the malady of Venetian marine painting has the *scirocco* in his bones. He knows that he is under a spell and yet he cannot quit the fascinating

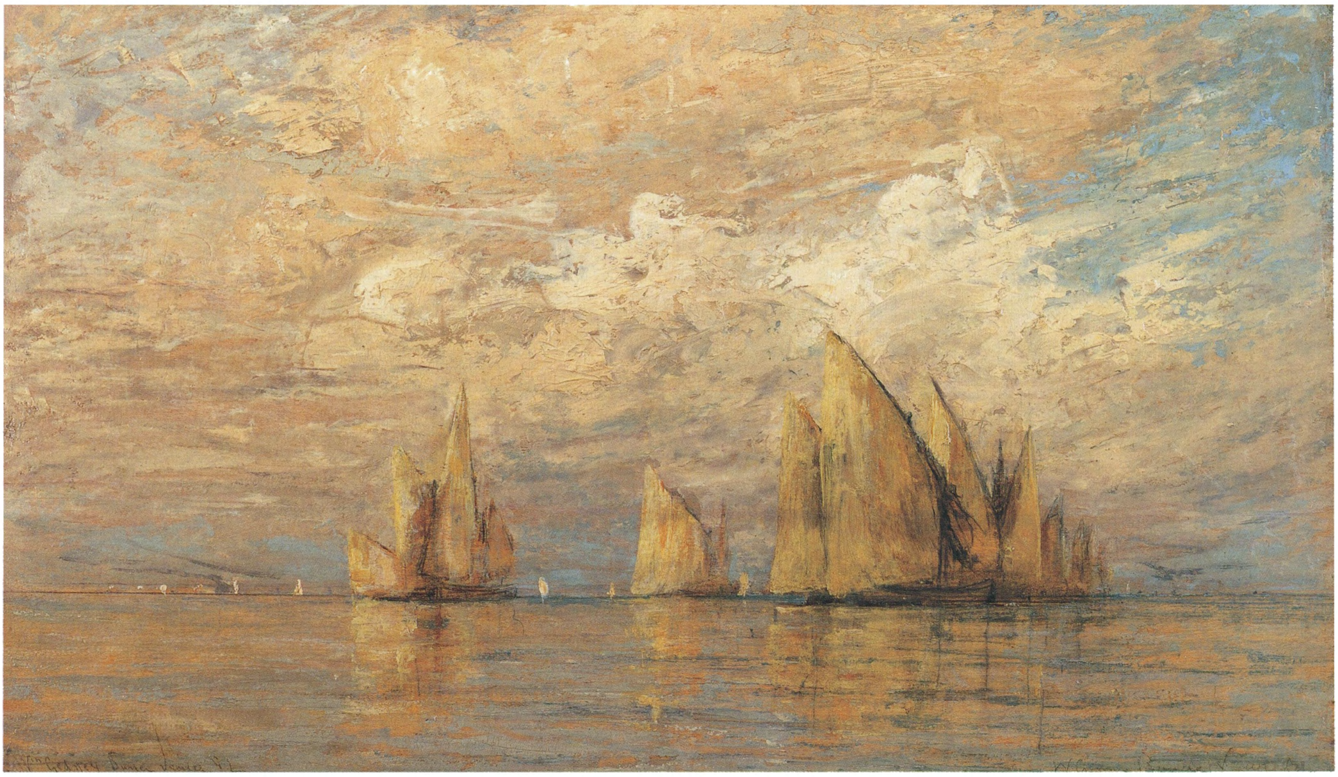


Fig. 3.30. William Gedney Bunce, *Venetian Boats*, 1882. Oil on panel, 15 x 25 in. Private collection.

spot."[41] Remarkably, Bunce continued to paint Venetian views for the entirety of his career. *Venetian Boats*, 1882 (fig. 3.30), is an example of the artist's early style. At first glance, it seems conventional in approach, but its surface is awash with broad and passionate brushwork, especially in the artist's energetic skies, a release of energy that allowed the colorist in him to exalt in swaths and swirls of roiling pigment. His white clouds in the center of the picture are laid in with a palette knife and lie thick and foaming on the surface of the panel. At the same time, carefully modulated tones throughout give a feeling of rest and harmony. Though naturalistic in design and concordant with the plein-air work of the French Impressionists along the lines of Boudin's work at Trouville in 1870s, Bunce's free handling of paint and expressionist bent, barely contained by the panel, is quite extraordinary for the period. There is something, too, of the rusticated dash found in Courbet and the early Whistler. Bunce would come to share Whistler's fascination, not just for Venice, but with the underlying abstraction of dramatic atmospheric conditions. The basic schematic format of sea and sky with a few sails and noted architectural forms to establish a horizon remained fundamentally unchanged throughout Bunce's career, a formula that in lesser hands might have ossified into a clichéd signature style. But a refining virtuosity and conceptualizing brilliance saved him. Most likely, as the artist aged, he worked less en plein air and more and more in the studio, retaining his basic scheme, within which he explored complex variations on his favored theme. Bunce also used unusually sized supports, or narrow horizontal or vertical formats, often squeezing the composition to further emphasize his skies, and thus give more leeway for his treatment of color and surface design—all to the end of an art that moved toward decorative abstraction.

Bunce's visionary marines, especially in the paint handling and tenebrous tonalities, have something of Ryder and Blakelock's eccentric romanticism about them. In *Venetian Sunset*, 1912 (fig. 3.31), the Bunce formula has been honed to a formal perfection; the triangular sail-shapes are stylized to mere geometric patterns, while the sky, squeezed by the narrow panel, opens upward so that it overhangs more than recedes, all to allow a more decorative and expressive patterning of pigment. Bunce's brushwork here displays such vital force and energy as to invite comparisons with the gestural brushwork of the Abstract Expressionist Willem de Kooning. Bunce's strategy is essentially reductive; his vision eliminates detail to concentrate on the purest aspects of atmosphere and light. His paint surfaces shimmer and dance with heavy impasto, the medium approximating the illuminating textures of sea and sky. In a genre that ever hovered on the possibility of cliché and redundancy, Bunce spun wondrous skeins of paint that were more about handling and surface pyrotechnics to explore the inner drama of perception, than about a depiction of the serene stillness of Venice at dusk. The artist managed the extraordinary trick of creating scenes of restfulness and silence with an activated surface of enormous power, a tension of means and ends that adds endless perceptual fascination to his work.

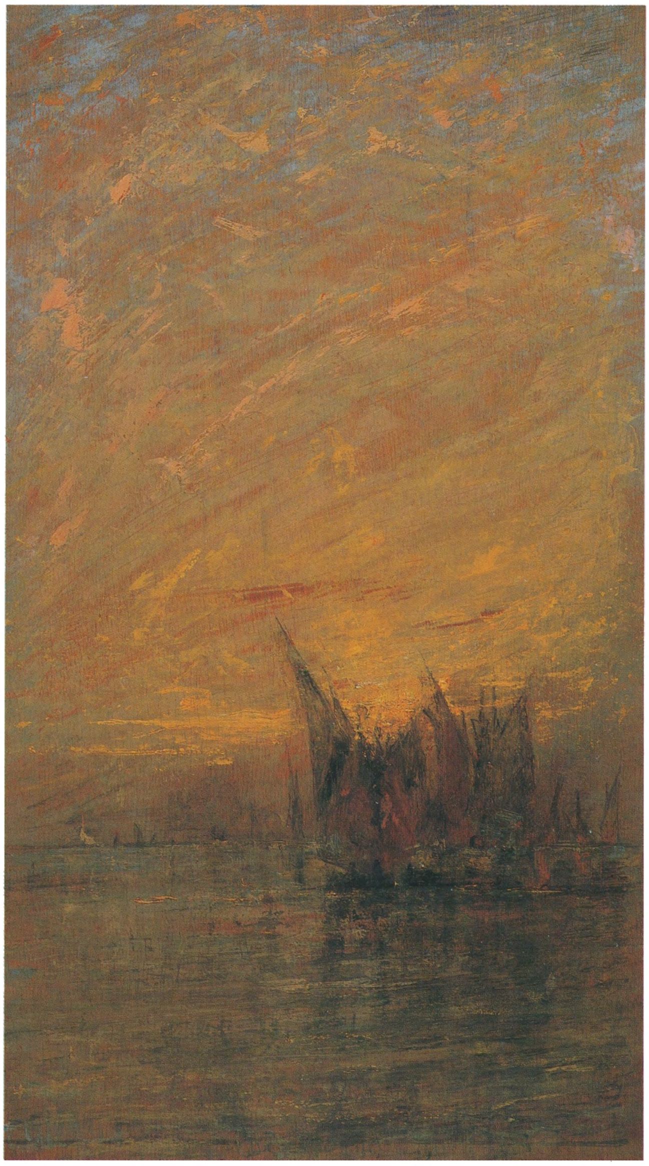


Fig. 3.31. William Gedney Bunce, *Venetian Sunset*, 1912. Oil on panel, 26 x 14 in. Private collection.

In his day, Bunce drew some renown for being collected by Queen Victoria. At Biarritz, France, for his health in 1889, he had established a small studio. A visiting Queen Victoria requested to see some of his work, which resulted in a commission for a view of the famous lighthouse along the rocky coast. The painting, or perhaps a Venetian view, was hung at Osborne House, the queen's vacation home on the Isle of Wight. Bunce was also a superb watercolorist and showed at one of the first exhibitions held by William Macbeth in 1892. The watercolor *Venetian Reflections* (fig. 3.32), circa 1895, displays Bunce's knack for translating his flashy brushwork and infinitely sensitive rendering of atmosphere to watercolor's delicate medium.

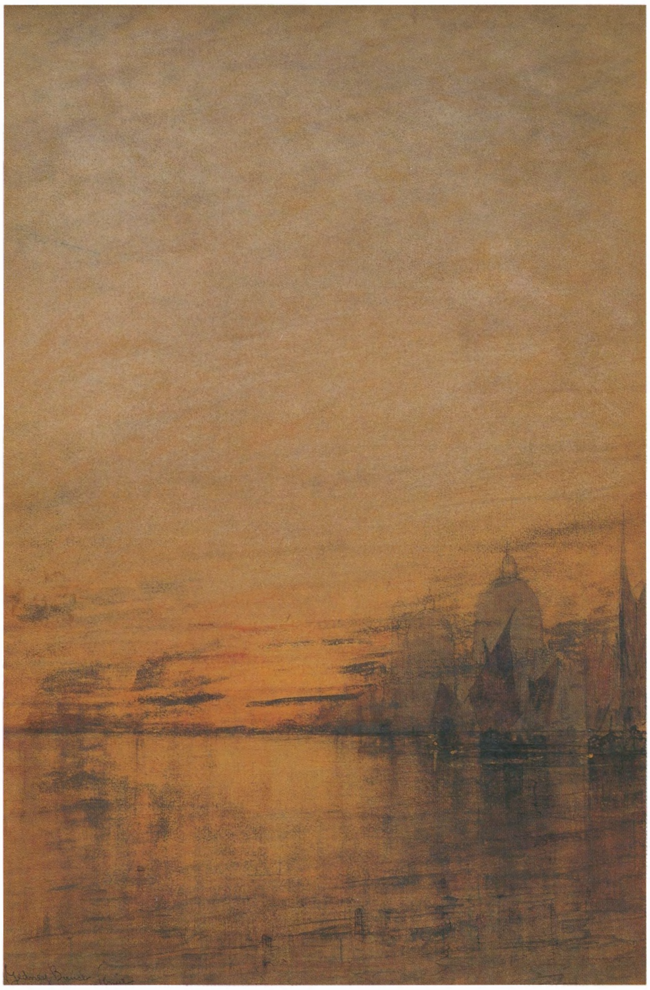


Fig. 3.32. William Gedney Bunce, *Venetian Reflections*, c. 1895. Watercolor, 21 x 14 in. Private collection.

Charles de Kay, reviewing the Macbeth exhibition, which included Homer, Murphy, and Eaton, noted the facility of all these artists as colorists. "Venetian sketches by William Gedney Bunce recall the time when his paintings and aquarelles were oftener seen in New York. 'Pearly Morning' and 'Approach to Venice' have his old delicate color sense and liking for the paler yellows. The latter is perhaps too generous in sky, and might be improved by cutting two inches off the upper part."[42] Even de Kay sometimes found Bunce's unconventionally sized formats difficult to appreciate. Given the artist's prominent reputation in his day, his influence within the Tonalist movement was probably formidable; his near abstract marines, serene formal harmonies of tone, dashing brushwork, and pictorial values surely dazzled his contemporaries, and like Whistler, represented a gauntlet thrown down for artists venturing to paint Venice or indulge in sunset marines. Samuel Isham wrote of Bunce being allied to artists like J. Francis Murphy, Bruce Crane, and Birge Harrison who delighted in a delicate use of tone and tint to produce broad effects. Isham also noted Bunce's strong conceptualist bent. "'Venetian Sails' or 'Fishing Boats,' or whatever he calls the myriad repetitions of his favorite theme, may be founded on long and patient watching of the shifting tints of sky and water, and frequently reproduce them with delicacy and veracity, yet there are other times when facts are used simply as a basis for elaborating subtle and beautiful color schemes which nature would find difficult in duplicating . . . it is the picture that interests him, not the subject, the harmonies that he discovers himself and works out with thin, transparent washes of tinted varnish over the surface of the panel."[43]

By pursuing a narrow vein of subject matter, Bunce pushed the expressive resources of his art in ways that presage modernist methods. *Sunset Variations*, circa 1900 (fig. 3.33), verges on complete abstraction, a merging of means and ends, in which the horizon line has been incised into the pigment to demarcate sea and sky. It is difficult to imagine a more mystic merging of the perceiver with the perceived, or a painted language more fully merged with the sensations of sight and sound, smell and taste, all channeled into the texture and expression of the pigment. The *New York Times* obituary of the artist compared Bunce to Ralph Albert Blakelock and Albert Ryder, noting "their inborn sense of color and the frequently turbulent splendor of it in their paintings. Bunce's pictures were not designed to be likenesses of nature, but they expressed the feelings which possessed him under the influence of some of nature's most glowing moods."[44] Royal Cortissoz, reviewing the work of Bunce from the perspective of the 1920s, considered him as the sole rival to Whistler in capturing the tender beauties of the lagoon city. "The only contemporary of his approaching him in this singularity and exquisiteness of achievement was William Gedney Bunce, whose characteristic design was composed of a long, low horizon line separating a tremulous lagoon from a vibrating sky, with a campanile or two lifted into the air and a group of sailboats shrewdly placed to right or left in the foreground. Out of these few materials he fashioned the most amazing opalescent effects. Like Whistler's, they are very new and personal. . . ."[45] Bunce died suddenly and tragically in 1916, hit by a car while crossing the street in his hometown of Hartford.

Duveneck, Chase, Currier, Twachtman, Muhrman, and Bunce were the shock troops that changed the course of American art. These Munich-trained artists, certainly in league with the older generation that included Inness, Wyant, Martin, Hunt, La Farge, and Whistler, accelerated the course of a more progressive art in New York from the late 1870s forward. The Society of American Artists, founded in 1877, proved to be the exhibition forum in which these progressives, along with their colleagues fresh from training in Paris and the American art colonies in Brittany, provided the catalyst for the full-blown development of the Tonalist movement. De Kay, looking back in 1898, recognized the decisive role the Munich men had played. "These bold and brave young artists scarcely realized themselves at the time what their revolt and their

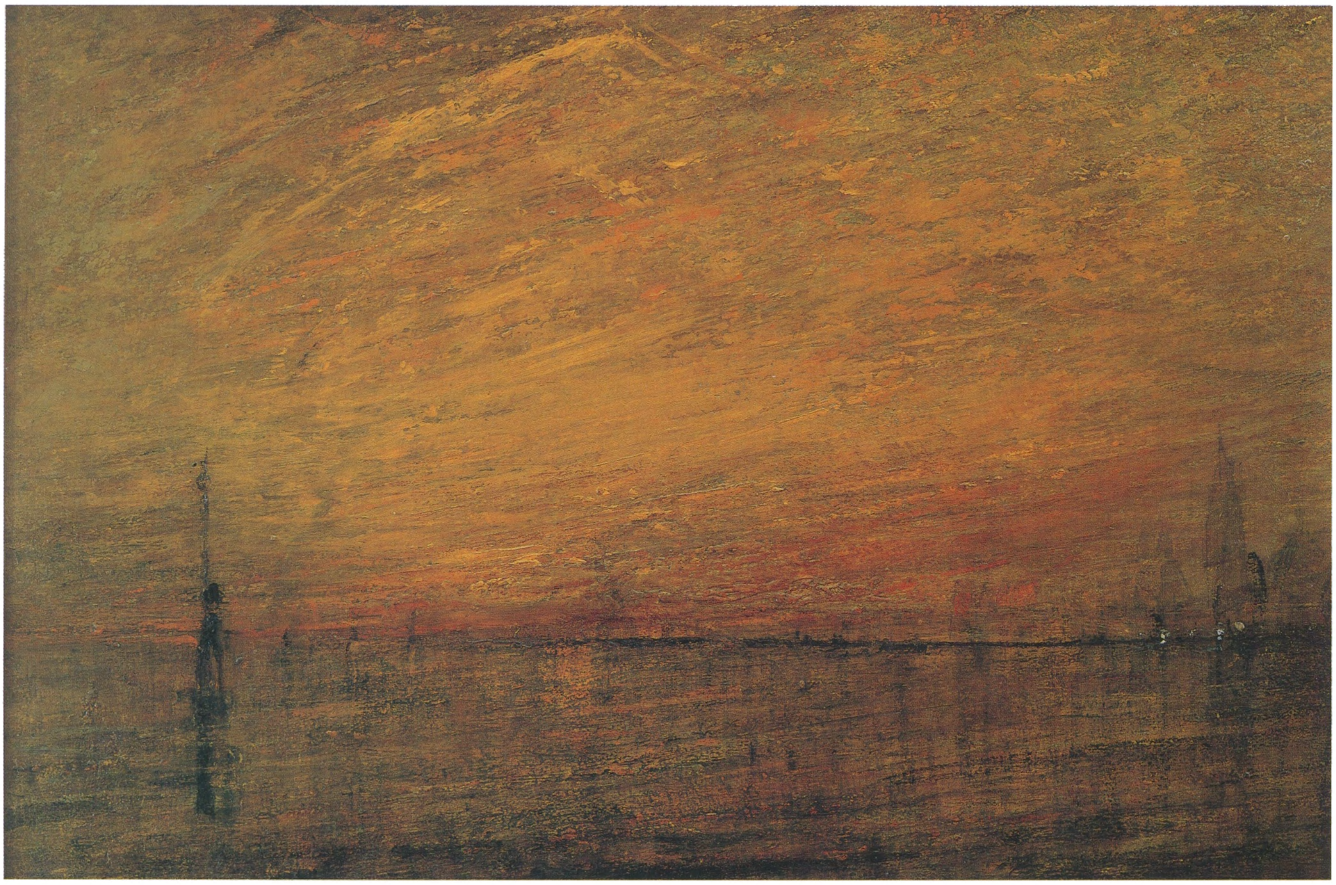


Fig. 3.33. William Gedney Bunce, *Sunset Variations*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 17 x 25 in. Private collection.

new movement meant to the cause of American art, nor how it wrote the doom of the well-termed Hudson River school of painting in this country, and the beginning of a new use of broader methods and more liberal ideas, which within a few years affected the old Academy itself."[46]

Yet, within only a matter of years from the early 1880s on, the Munich style as a distinct way of handling pigment was gradually absorbed into the artistic firmament of American art. Chase maintained aspects of the style through his teaching and painting, especially his still lifes of fish, which displayed the bravura paint handling and dark old-master tonalities that originally characterized the Munich mode. Currier, who retained the expressive facture in his watercolors and pastels, exhibited infrequently and remained in Germany until his return to Boston. Duveneck faded as an active presence in the art world and Muhrman moved to London in 1884, where he took on a second life as a modernist, merging his penchant for the somber tonalities of Munich with Whistler's moody aestheticism. Twachtman, probably the most influential artist of all the Munich men (Chase was more influential as a teacher), was a sponge for artistic ideas and seemed able to effortlessly shed aspects of his Munich training and modulate his technique to suit his changing purposes. In later years, he disparaged his early enthusiasm for the dark tonalities of the Munich School. Nor did he easily make concessions to the art market. It is hard to believe that his serene masterpiece, *Arques-la-Bataille* (fig. 3.29), was produced by a student of Munich. Twachtman's keen sensitivity to outdoor light trumped academic teachings, although he may well have been influenced by the Hague School and its artists, or possibly the example of French painter Jules Bastien-Lepage, whose renditions of crystalline atmospheric space in his naturalistic genre paintings of peasants had such a profound influence on many American expatriates, especially those around J. Alden Weir and the brothers Alexander and Birge Harrison. It is to these and other American painters who studied in Paris and spent their summers in Brittany and Normandy that the discussion now turns, leaving an exploration of Twachtman's later work—and Chase's landscapes of the 1880s—to following chapters.

The French Training Grounds: Paris and Brittany

John Henry Twachtman was one of hundreds of Americans studying in Paris in the 1870s and 1880s, and that number would reach the thousands by the turn of the century. As Munich faded in drawing power for young and ambitious American artists, Paris increasingly became the place for serious art instruction, where academic credentials and recognition could be systematically established though conscientious study. Academic success offered entrée to the annual Salons: there, amid the great masters of French art, the most glittering prizes of professional validation beckoned the talented expatriate. With the end of the Civil War, first in a trickle and then in droves, the young Americans began to flock to Paris. The gold standard for many French and foreign students was the national École des Beaux-Arts, which required rigorous entrance examinations and offered the most challenging regimen of study. For the chosen few, study at the Beaux-Arts might lead to the ultimate prize in the academic system, the Prix de Rome. For Americans like Arthur Bridgman, William Sartain, and Thomas Eakins, Jean-Léon Gérôme, one of the three teachers of painting at the Beaux-Arts, represented the pinnacle of the French tradition of academic excellence. There were other teachers and ateliers, like the ever-popular Académie Julian, which was less formal and allowed women to enter as students, something the Beaux-Arts would not do until 1897. Thomas Couture was popular with Americans like William Morris Hunt, who were of a more colorist bent, while other teachers offered their particular slant on the French academic tradition. Paris, of course, was an artistic Mecca, with a cornucopia of opportunities for the student that included galleries, studios, expositions, and the great treasure houses of art: the Musée de Luxembourg for modern art and the Louvre with its unparalleled historical collections, tailor-made for the study and copying of old masters. All that was new and talked about could be viewed in exhibitions large and small, along with the chance to rub shoulders with famous figures in the artistic community. Competition for places at the Beaux-Arts was brutal, however, and selection to the Salon, much less winning prizes, required not just talent but insider connections and art-world politicking. The training in the fundamentals, especially drawing and figure work, was the finest available, but so was the temptation to move in lockstep with prevailing fashion. For young, impressionable Americans, the academic machine of Paris could just as easily kill an individual gift as open doors to professional stardom. The best teachers, like Gérôme, kept to the basics and warned students against imitating the masters' style, encouraging them to forge a personal statement based on their individual talents and proclivities.

Americans studying in Paris, given the cultural affinity of sophisticated Americans of the day for all things European, were especially susceptible to the curse of blandly imitating their French betters. Along with the hurdles of language and culture, the young Americans faced the conundrum that although academic technical training was highly valued and considered the sine qua non in many circles for a professional career, too much exposure to French or foreign influences, especially in matters of style and subject matter, might corrupt or warp an innate American temperament and so render the fledgling artist a mere follower of European fashion. Or, as Henry James wrote in 1887: "It sounds like a paradox, but it is a very simple truth, that when to-day we look for 'American art' we find it mainly in Paris. When we find it out of Paris, we at least find a great deal of Paris in it."[47] This was an issue that consumed contemporary American critics as they sought to establish a new paradigm for what constituted an appropriate American style, that illusive mixture of approach, native perspective, and subject matter that would allow American artists to distinguish themselves on the world stage. Many American artists, like Daniel Ridgway Knight, Charles Sprague Pearce, and John Singer Sargent—on a dazzling level—opted for the expatriate life and stayed on in France, producing figurative works in cosmopolitan styles nearly indistinguishable from their European counterparts. These pictures retained some cachet for the home market but were, even then, often disparaged by progressive American critics for aping European fashions. Many American portraitists and figure and genre painters of the day fell into the trap of weak, facile imitation and are today nearly forgotten. For American landscape painters, engaged in an art that was fundamentally non-academic, atelier training might be doubly damaging: dulling native affinities and encouraging the production of European scenes, either in a faux-Barbizon mode—watering cows being the most egregious—or depictions of quaintly costumed peasant figures, in a stereotypical and pedantic manner verging on tourist kitsch. As has been seen, the finest American landscape painters of the Munich School—Chase, Duveneck, Currier, Twachtman, Muhrman, and Bunce—avoided this pitfall. They were able to turn their training to the advantage of their landscape art, producing work of great individuality and technical brilliance, with a radical, forward-looking bent that was modern and vital even within progressive European circles. Whistler, of course, would manage this masterfully. The Munich-trained artists offered an early vision of what a national art, and national style, might look like (*Champs Elysée*, c. 1885, fig. 3.34).

Only a relative few of the American landscape painters who came out of the Parisian ateliers and the American expatriate communities in Brittany and Normandy avoided the trap of producing Salon art along the lines of their teachers and fellow students—the "machines" of Joseph Pennell's inimitable description, most likely to garner academic prizes. If the finest Munich-trained Americans emerged earlier with their individuality intact, prepared and eager to make lasting contributions to American art, it may be that the Munich system placed fewer temptations on blind imitation of academic models. It is noteworthy that when Chase, Currier, and Duveneck first exhibited academic oils in America, often genre and portrait studies, these works drew the most savage criticism, both for subject matter and the radical paint handling. The painterly and colorist Munich technique with its strong rhythmic forms may well have been inherently more adaptable to landscape art than the line-oriented art taught in the Parisian

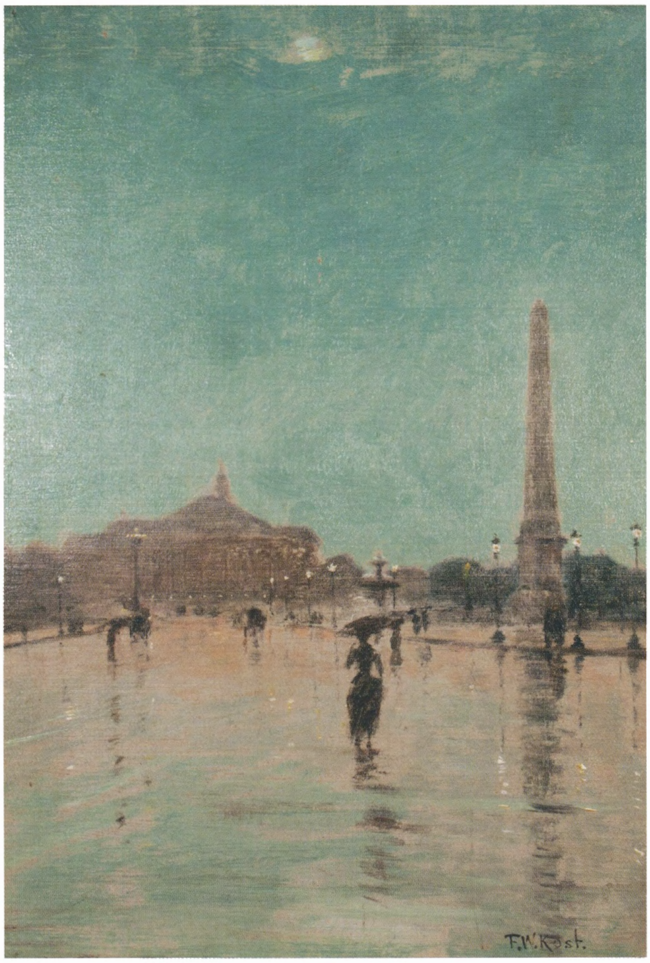


Fig. 3.34. Frederick W. Kost, *Champs Elysées*, c. 1895. Oil on panel, 14 x 9½ in. Private collection.

ateliers. What saved so many expatriate Americans who studied in Paris from the abyss of imitation were the American art colonies in Brittany. Of the Parisian-trained expatriates (those from the generation after Whistler) who spent significant time in Brittany, and stayed and worked abroad, only a handful, like Alexander Harrison, Arthur Bridgman (in his early landscape work), and Charles Fromuth, created distinctive, sometimes radical work that set them apart from their European contemporaries. For the group of French-trained Americans who worked in the American art colonies of Brittany and who then returned home, it often required a number of years for them to dispense with the trappings of their academic schooling and develop a more personal and ultimately a more American idiom, in line with what Inness had already established and later refined further along the aesthetic lines championed by Whistler. Nevertheless, the experience of working in Brittany proved critical to the success of many Tonalists; not the least of the advantages turned out to be the chance to exchange ideas with their compatriots. In fact, something of a distinct national landscape style actually developed in these American artist colonies. In the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, the American Tonalists—many had spent time working in Brittany—won the majority of critical accolades. In the eyes of Europeans and Americans alike, the Tonalist style of landscape painting in 1900 represented *the* distinctive contribution of America to the fine arts. A subtle but lingering component of these landscapes—the brooding symbolism and atmospheric quality the French judges probably admired—had been developed twenty and thirty years before in the American art colonies in Brittany then translated into homegrown imagery (fig. 3.35).

The finest and most distinctive Tonalist landscapists in 1900 had achieved their success by avoiding the pitfalls of the academic potboiler. Some, like the Harrison brothers, William Sartain, and J. Alden Weir, had come to Paris determined to have careers in genre and portrait painting and later discovered their métier in landscape; others, like Twachtman, Dwight Tryon, Charles Harold Davis (Davis spent ten years in Fleury near Barbizon), Arthur Dow, and Hugh Bolton Jones, came as confirmed landscapists and never deviated from their subject. All, to some degree, whatever their preferences in terms of genre, were forced to come to terms with the difficult market conditions in America in the crucial decades of the 1880s and 1890s: excluding portraits, the market was decidedly bullish for landscapes. The Paris-trained artists, who lacked exposure to the landscape innovations developed by their American colleagues in Brittany, or who were entirely uninterested in landscape, domestic or foreign, might find a ready market for portraiture when they returned to America—and a slim livelihood. In America before 1900, there was relatively little interest in figurative or genre work, as well as the nude—the

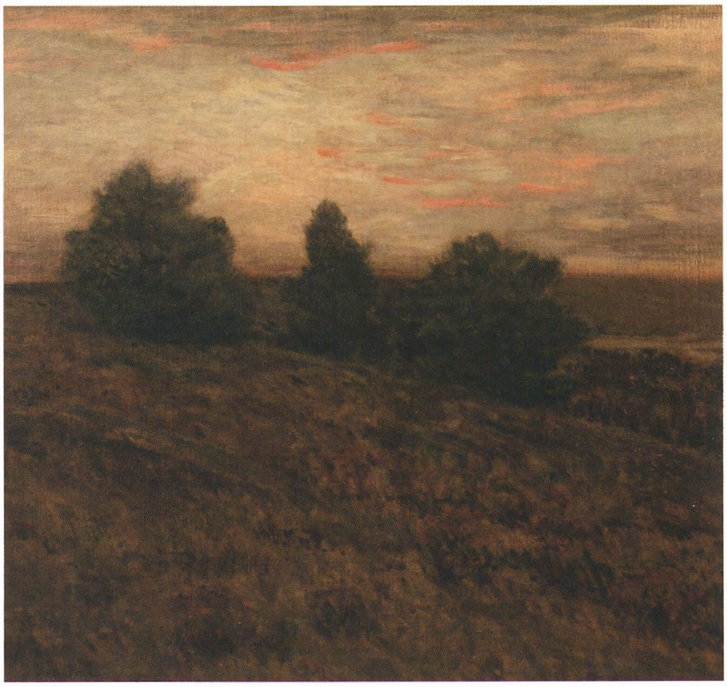


Fig. 3.35. Charles Warren Eaton, *Autumnal*, c. 1900–1910. Oil on canvas, 28 x 30 in. Private collection.

core of Parisian academic study, frustrating the careers of such painters as Thomas Eakins and Kenyon Cox. The market that existed for genre was a limited one, especially since European genre painters between 1880 and 1900—artists of high repute with Salon medals and decorations to prove it—enjoyed enormous cachet in fashionable American collecting circles and, if they did not dominate the field, certainly made it difficult for Americans to compete on equal ground. Historian Samuel Isham noted the quandaries the academy-trained painter faced from foreign competition in the decades before 1900. "The American student upon his return had none of these [medals and Salon distinctions] qualifications. He was rarely ever able to paint a clever *genre* picture, nor as a rule did he desire to do so. His ambition as well as his real feeling directed him to more purely artistic qualities, to refinement of drawing, beautiful color, skillful handling. His ideals were incomplete and savored of the school which he had so recently left, where a well-constructed figure or a bit of strong, sure handling had been enough to win the praise and admiration of his fellows. He had not yet learned the necessity of unity, the higher composition that makes a picture the rounded expression of an artistic idea, and yet his workmanship by all school standards was so manifestly superior to that current in America that immediate recognition of its merits seemed to him inevitable."[48]

As in the days of the Hudson River School, the market for landscape in America proved to be the most accessible, durable, and financially rewarding. So although American exhibitions of the early 1880s, especially the first exhibitions of the radical Society of American Artists, might initially feature figurative, still-life, and genre subjects, as the returning Americans from Munich and Paris eagerly displayed their hard-won European training, the landscape painters—indigenous and foreign-trained—inexorably began to claim the lion's share of attention and sales, fully triumphing by the turn of the century. Progressive critics like Charles de Kay consistently singled out the landscape talents of Inness, Currier, Muhrman, Martin, Ryder, and others as exemplifying what was new and dynamic in American art. Those Americans with experience of the Brittany landscape, who got the feel and texture of landscape under their skin, were well placed to take advantage of the burgeoning demand for landscape once they returned to America. On American shores, by virtue particularly of the Art Students League and the competitive experience of the major exhibitions, the expatriate and indigenous landscapists underwent a process of merging and cross-pollination, both in terms of subject matter and technical know-how, and more important, in a growing enthusiasm for the American scene. Within a few years, the silvery light, lustrous atmosphere, high horizons, and shimmering low tonality developed in Brittany merged into the hallmarks of the Tonalist landscape as it evolved in the decades before the turn of the century.

This evolutionary adaptation partly explains why the finest of the Paris-trained landscapists yield so little overt evidence of their atelier training or a stylistic affinity with a particular master. The most striking stylistic traits common to these expatriate artists were, in fact, developed in association with their compatriots in the Breton art colonies—not in the Parisian ateliers. In many cases, the inborn emotional temperament of their upbringing (memory, literary and cultural associations, and habit connected to native ground) was reinforced by likeminded compatriots in the summer training grounds of Brittany and Normandy. Along these beautiful coasts, ensconced in picturesque villages like Pont-Aven and Concarneau, the Americans were inspired by the rugged countryside and the microclimate, the soft humid, often luminous silver-grays of coastal weather (not unlike that of Newport, which Hunt and La Farge had exploited, and later on the Monterey Peninsula in California). This cool and shadowless crystalline atmosphere was tailor-made for the Tonalist palette; it was the same crystalline atmospheric envelope of air that the Frenchman Jules Bastien-Lepage drew upon so brilliantly in his outdoor work, and in turn inspired a whole generation of American expatriates. For many Americans who continued to paint the figure during their student years abroad, the experience of the American art colonies in Brittany and Normandy proved decisive: landscape work got under their skins. In Concarneau, Pont-Aven, and Larmor, and their rock-strewn coastlines, hilly pastures, and ancient orchards, young American artists released from the drudgery and distractions of Paris developed a dynamic camaraderie. Prices for housing and food were cheap, rustic models available, and there was always the chance of rubbing shoulders with some charismatic artistic figure. As the artist Arthur Hoeber wrote, Paris in the summer, with the hubbub of the Salon over, could be hellish. "Paris was hot and impossible in its whiteness; the brilliancy of the light stone-work of its buildings, combined with the glare from the asphalt, dazzled one's eyes and drew all the heat in the simmering July sky. Good resolutions of

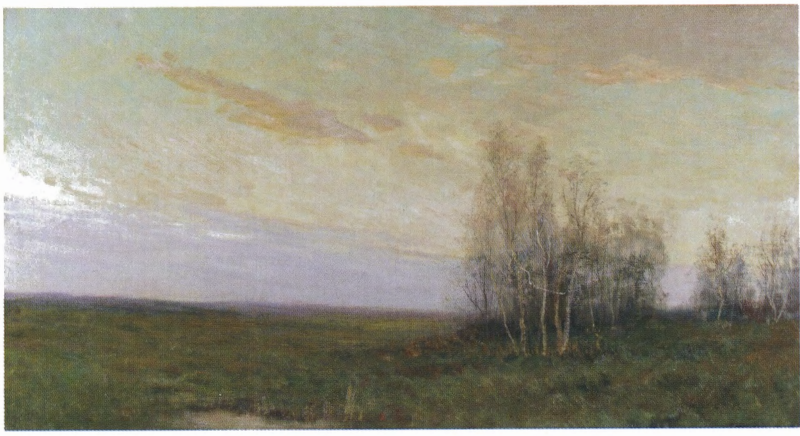


Fig. 3.36. Arthur Hoeber, *Twilight Meadow*, c. 1890s. Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in. Courtesy Hawthorne Fine Art.

remaining at the Beaux-Arts till the last day of the session faded gradually away. The cafés on the Boulevard began to pall; the little room *au sixième* certainly was stuffy, and familiar faces in the streets became more and more rare. It was time to go to the country"[49] (*Twilight*, c. 1890, fig. 3.36).

The first American artists and founders of the art colony at Pont-Aven, arrived during 1866 in the aftermath of the Civil War; they were Philadelphians Earl Shinn and Robert Wylie and were soon to be joined by Frederick Arthur Bridgman, who hailed from Brooklyn. They would be followed by wave after wave of Americans as the Breton artist colonies grew in fame. American newspapers ran reports of the artists' doings and novelists fictionalized and romanticized the artists' lifestyle. Each generation had its leading lights who left a mark on their contemporaries and followers. Bridgman would be the first to fully exploit the landscape potential of Brittany, and in turn he would be followed by the Harrison brothers, Alexander and Birge, Arthur Hoeber, Hugh Bolton Jones, and J. Alden Weir, all acolytes of Jules Bastien-Lapage. Alexander Harrison, who made his career in France, explored the opalescent light of the Breton shoreline and fundamentally revolutionized marine painting in France and America. For Birge Harrison and artists like J. Alden Weir and Arthur Hoeber who returned to America, the phenomenon of the muted light along the Breton coast never entirely left them: they had been seduced and their eyes reattuned, and the enchantment endured. After the experience of Brittany, the typical glaring brightness of sunny days in America became problematic, if not anathema to their artistic concerns. Autumn and winter and coastal fogs became ways of finessing the issue of the glaring light of the American summer. Whistler, too, had been drawn to the northern coast of France throughout his career and painted one of his first masterpieces—*The Coast of Brittany* (also known as *Alone with the Tide*; see fig. 3.58)—along the rocky Breton shoreline in 1861. Birge Harrison, the greatest theorist of Tonalist light, wrote of Concarneau's peculiar appeal: "The most agreeable season of the year in Concarneau is perhaps the winter and the early spring, for, owing to the proximity of the Gulf Stream, the climate is always mild, and the prevailing weather in the year's infancy is a beautiful silvery gray, without rain. It is then that the most serious work is done."[50] The Parisian ateliers may have provided the grammar and syntax for their art, but for many young American expatriates from the 1860s right through 1900, the real language of art, its deepest poetry was discovered in the out-of-doors, where the inspiration of light and air was channeled onto canvas by the artist's need to express the feelings and moods invoked by foreign climes. Initially, the immemorial pastoral and fishing worlds of the Breton folk served as backdrops for quaint genre paintings—the cloying peasant pictures that were the bane of progressive critics; but over time, it was the landscape itself—seen fresh through American eyes—that increasingly became the source and subject of true inspiration. And when the expatriate artists returned home, much of the bewitching quicksilver atmosphere of Brittany—certainly an approximation of its spirit—would find its way into their American landscapes, often depicting dawn or dusk, or overcast days filled with autumn mists or winter fogs. Eventually, the bright light of midday would go out of fashion for a generation.

Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1847–1928)

One of the earliest of the post–Civil War artists to arrive in Paris was Frederick Arthur Bridgman, who joined Jean-Léon Gérôme's atelier at the École des Beaux-Arts in February 1867 (fig. 3.37). Bridgman is a true paradox in American art in that he achieved fame and fortune in his day for meticulously executed and historically accurate Orientalist art, in some respects surpassing his teacher, Gérôme, in the genre, thus failing to fulfill his early promise as a talented painter of landscape. Bridgman was a hard worker and a superb painter, as good as his classmate in Gérôme's atelier, Thomas Eakins. History has tended to punish Bridgman by neglecting him; he is regarded largely as a brilliant imitator of a European genre fallen from fashion, unlike Eakins who is revered as a vigorous realist for his American subject matter. Often overlooked is the fact that at the very beginning of his career, Bridgman aspired to paint landscape, and succeeded with work that was as bold and innovative as it was captivating. Given its early date, *Brittany Sunset*, 1873 (fig. 3.38), might have foretold a triumphant future for Bridgman on a par with Inness, if Bridgman had returned

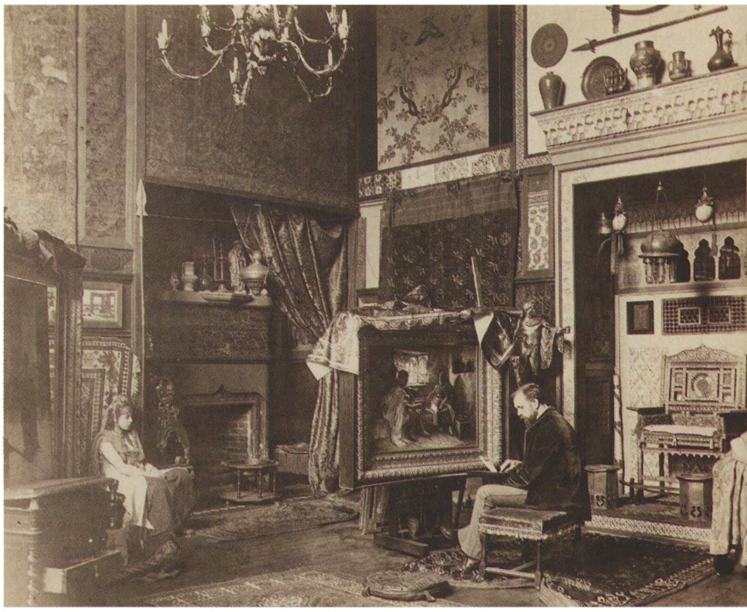


Fig. 3.37. Frederick Arthur Bridgman photographed at work in his studio, c. 1890. Platinum print, 5.9 x 4.7 in. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1963, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

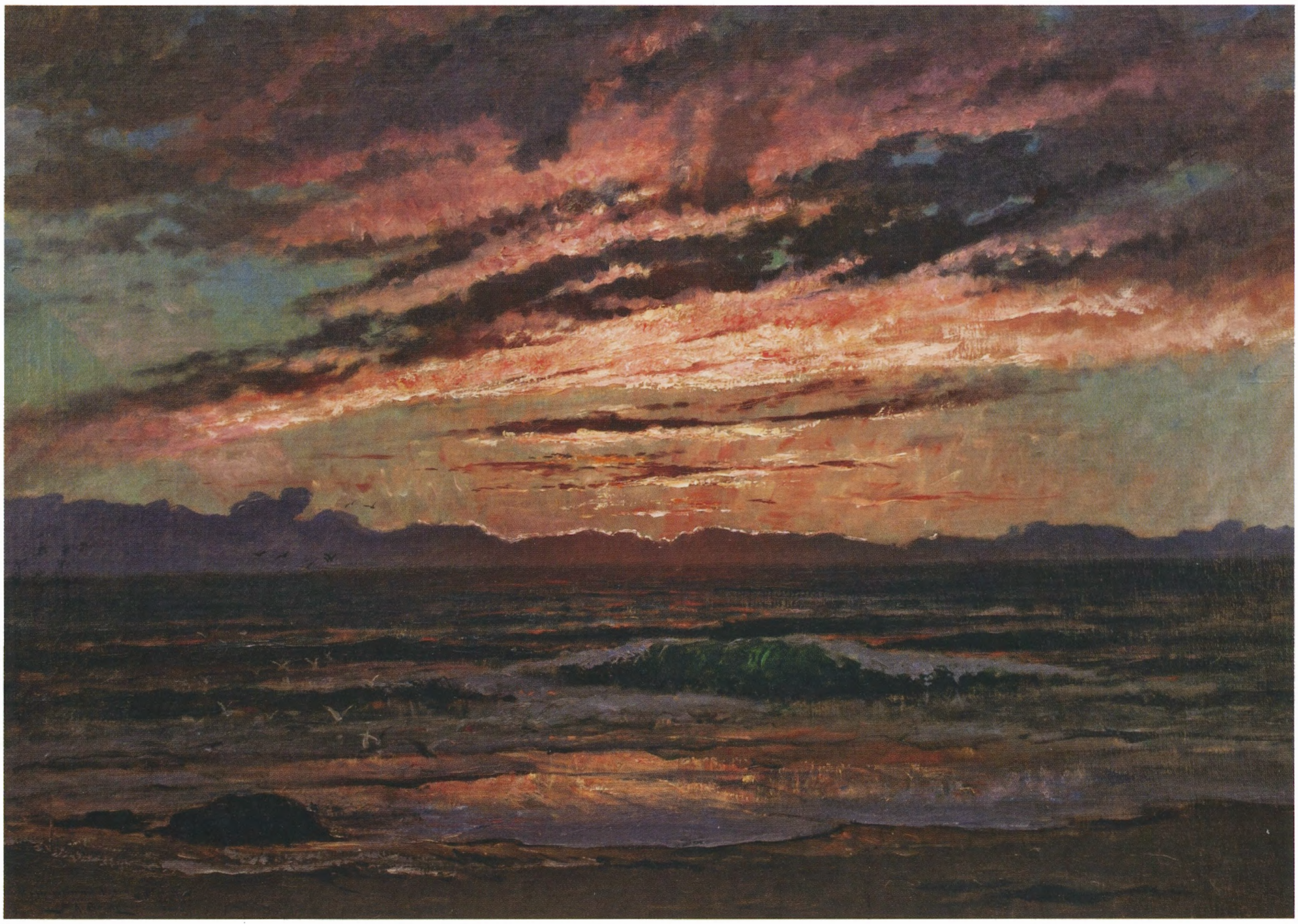


Fig. 3.38. Frederick Arthur Bridgman, *Brittany Sunset*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 26 x 36 in. Private collection.

to America, having been one of the early founders of the American artists' colony at Pont-Aven in Brittany. Arriving in Pont-Aven in 1866, he first spent his summers there when Gérôme's atelier was closed, and later, during the period of the Franco-Prussian War and the Paris Commune, in 1870–71, lived in Brittany full-time to save money. By all accounts he was an industrious artist and, along with his compatriot Robert Wylie, originated many of the plein-air approaches to Breton subject matter that would become standard fare for American artists working in Brittany. Bridgman, too, although he would make his early reputation with Breton genre subjects, was drawn to the beauty of pure landscape. In the 1870s, before his fame as an Orientalist, Bridgman was recognized as an accomplished landscapist on both sides of the Atlantic. Earl Shinn, a fellow artist who worked with Bridgman in Brittany and later became an important critic (and an admirer of Currier), wrote of his friend's infatuation with the soft light along the coast. "Bridgman's five successive summers in Brittany, in the dewy, cloudy air full of mystery, amid the companionship of able landscape artists, riveted his attention to the wonders of atmosphere, and made him forever ambitious of landscape excellence."[51] *Brittany Sunset* displays the artist's early mastery of landscape, especially his ability to capture the quality of atmospheric light produced by a fading sun, here reflected from sky to water across a complex composition of wave patterns and a spectacular display of billowing clouds. The range of various lighting effects is extraordinary, from the backlit clouds on the horizon, to the fiery soft masses on the underbellies of the cloud formations that loom overhead, to the translucency of the waves caressing the beach. There is a rendering of natural pattern that is both realistic and decorative, while the subtle tonal transitions throughout make for a haunting harmony. The free and painterly style employed by Bridgman is quite distinct from the precision of his master Gérôme and suggests that Bridgman's life along the Breton coast and his long hours painting plein-air were instrumental in producing a very personal approach to landscape that has less to do with French Barbizon sources and more to do with the palpable feel of misty sea air and the largeness of coastal views. Bridgman's academic Tonalism, retaining local detail but painted in broad descriptive forms and refined modulations of color, predates by at least ten years the better-known marines that Alexander Harrison painted along the same coast in the 1880s.

Bridgman continued to paint landscapes throughout his career, though his claim to contemporary fame was largely based on his Orientalist work. Two landscapes from the 1890s,

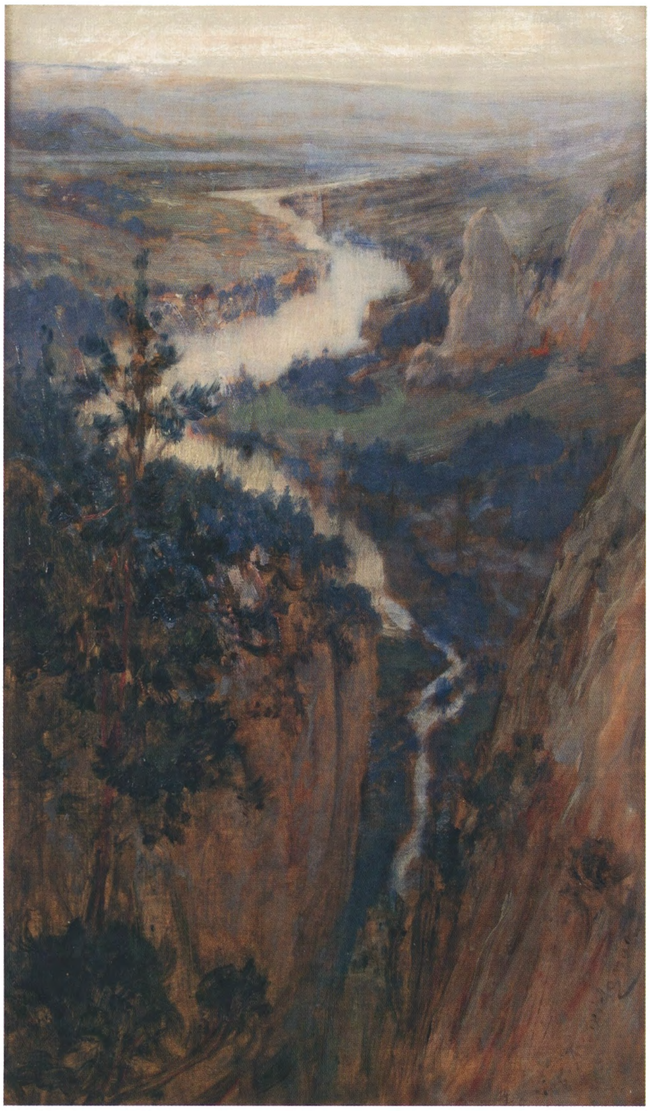


Fig. 3.39. Frederick Arthur Bridgman, *River Vista*, c. 1890s. Oil on canvas, 20 x 12 in. Private collection.

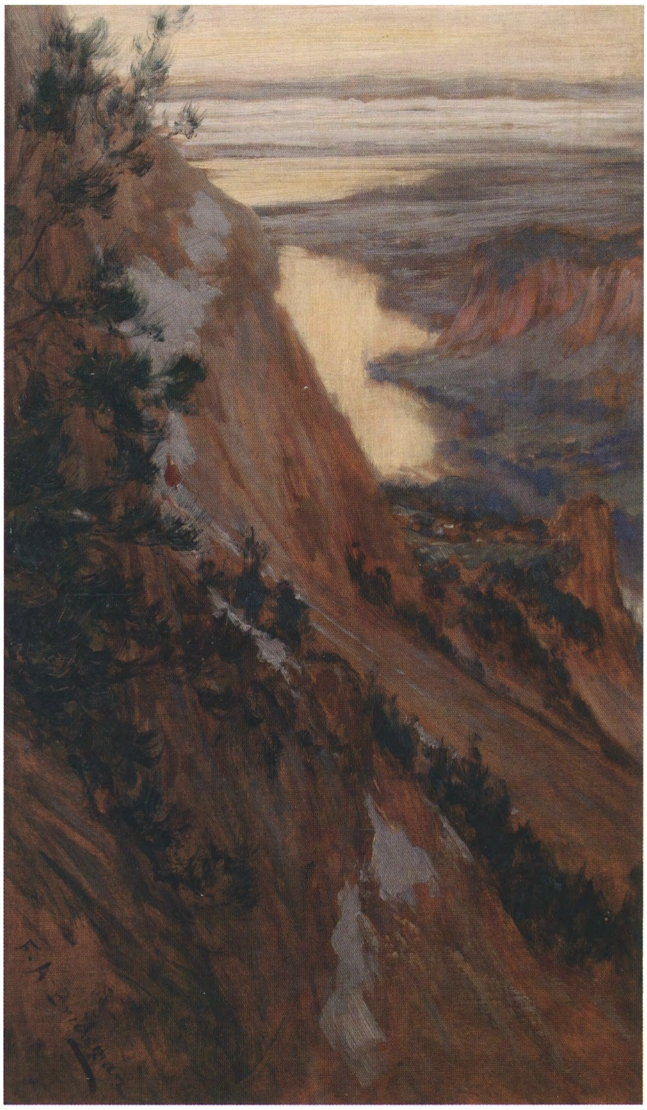


Fig. 3.40. Frederick Arthur Bridgman, *Sea Vista*, c. 1890s. Oil on canvas, 20 x 12 in. Private collection.

River Vista, circa 1890s, and *Sea Vista*, circa 1890s (figs. 3.39 and 3.40), demonstrate Bridgman's evolution over twenty years or so, moving toward more abstract and decorative renderings along Whistlerian lines. Bridgman employs a deft touch with lightly brushed medium-infused colors that have the fluid consistency of the surfaces used by Whistler in his Nocturnes. The high, angled viewpoint, reminiscent of Chinese and Japanese paintings and woodcuts, allows the artist to exploit meteorological and geological patterns throughout, patterns at once abstract, decorative, and full of sensuous surface quality. The spark of inspiration from his early days in Brittany remains strong in these later landscapes, in which the naturalism of his 1870s work has been transformed into scenes of rare beauty and formal interest. In the 1880s, Bridgman had large exhibitions of his work, including his early landscapes, in New York, and these lush Tonalist scenes would exert an enduring influence on rising American artists. Late in his career, Bridgman continued to execute landscapes but in a more international Impressionist style; charming and full of narrative interest, they lack the vigor and freshness of his early work. Like an uprooted character out of Henry James, one wonders what Bridgman might have achieved had he refused the siren song of Europe and returned to his homeland.

Alexander Harrison (1853–1930)

Perhaps the most important and influential Tonalist painter who emerged from the Paris and Brittany training grounds was Alexander Harrison, who became known as the "dean" of American painters working in the Montparnasse art colony. Harrison, a student of Gérôme, painted in both Concarneau and Pont-Aven in the years after 1879, about ten years after Bridgman first came to Brittany. His younger brother, Birge Harrison, who began his studies in Alexandre Cabanal's atelier, also worked in Brittany and would become hugely influential in America by 1890. The Harrison brothers would go on to formidable careers as Tonalist artists and would extend their influence as teachers, Alexander Harrison in Paris, and Birge Harrison in Woodstock, where he taught summer classes at the Art Students League. Alexander Harrison became renowned for his marines, which he first developed over his summers in Brittany. His affinity for marine subjects may well have been gestating during his five years of service with the U.S. Coastal Survey in Maine, Rhode Island, Florida, and Puget Sound in the early 1870s. Like so many Tonalist landscapists who studied in Paris, Alexander Harrison first made his mark as a figurative painter, gaining great success at the Paris Salon with *Castles in Spain*, painted in 1881 at Pont-Aven (now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art). Later, he would receive even greater accolades for his pathbreaking plein-air study of nude women, *En Arcadie* (Musée d'Orsay), exhibited at the Salon of 1886. The posing of nudes outdoors in natural light without historical or literary association was audacious for the time, causing a stir in some circles for its unabashed naturalism (although well within the range of artistic propriety). Before outdoor nudes became the rage among American Impressionist artists working at Giverny in the 1890s and, of course, in the work of Renoir and other French Impressionists, Alexander Harrison was considered to be at the forefront of the figurative plein-air movement. Nonetheless, it was for his Tonalist marines that he gained greatest renown and which today still offer proof of an unsurpassed technical and expressive mastery. For both American and French artists, Harrison's marines set a benchmark for the depiction of scintillating light effects produced by wave action or listless currents under subdued conditions of dusk or moonlight. Although very different from Whistler's broadly abstract Nocturnes, both American artists show a preoccupation with the fleeting beauty of twilight effects on water and sky, often realized through memory in the studio.

The Wave, circa 1885 (fig. 3.41), established Harrison's reputation, winning an honorable mention at the 1885 Paris Salon. It was a revelation in the art world of the day, combining meticulous yet mellifluous academic finesse with a super-realistic outdoor naturalism that displayed the intricate harmonizing and defining qualities of low ambient light. Harrison's technical prowess revealed as never before the enveloping atmosphere of dusk and its effect on local color. Every value or tone elides into the next with a sumptuous and supersensuous radiance. Art historian David Sellin recounts the origins of Harrison's inspiration. "Harrison was becoming more and more absorbed with painting twilight and nocturnal effects of sea and sky, requiring of necessity memory of effects, rather than direct transcription. Walking one evening in the summer of 1884 with Bastien (Bastien-Lepage) on the embankment at Concarneau, Harrison remarked to his friend that he would make of that moonrise over the twilit bay his masterpiece. A small memory sketch the next day was followed by a series of studies to improve composition, color and tone, and during that winter he worked up two paintings. . . . His method of work was established."[52] *The Wave*, exhibited in 1885, is a huge canvas, nearly 40 by 118 inches, and its impact on the contemporary art world was profound and far-reaching. Harrison's use of memory and small studies, akin to Whistler's methods for his Nocturnes in the previous decade, influenced a generation of painters who revered him as an artist and teacher. One of Harrison's students, Cecelia Beaux, who knew Harrison well, relates his working methods on *The Wave*, derived from memories of a promenade on the coast near Pont-Aven. "He could not be called a Nature-lover, for he loved Nature perhaps only when married to art. He saw large and wished to paint large . . . He was enamored of the successive opaline surfaces of low incoming waves and strove for the Sea's gift as it comes to one facing it on long beaches. His method was searching, and had the quality of science, perhaps because he had been trained as an engineer, which profession he abandoned for painting. His attack began with a small study, only a few tones of the choicest, an ébauche for a certain effect, at a certain hour, but whose sign and substance was to last and

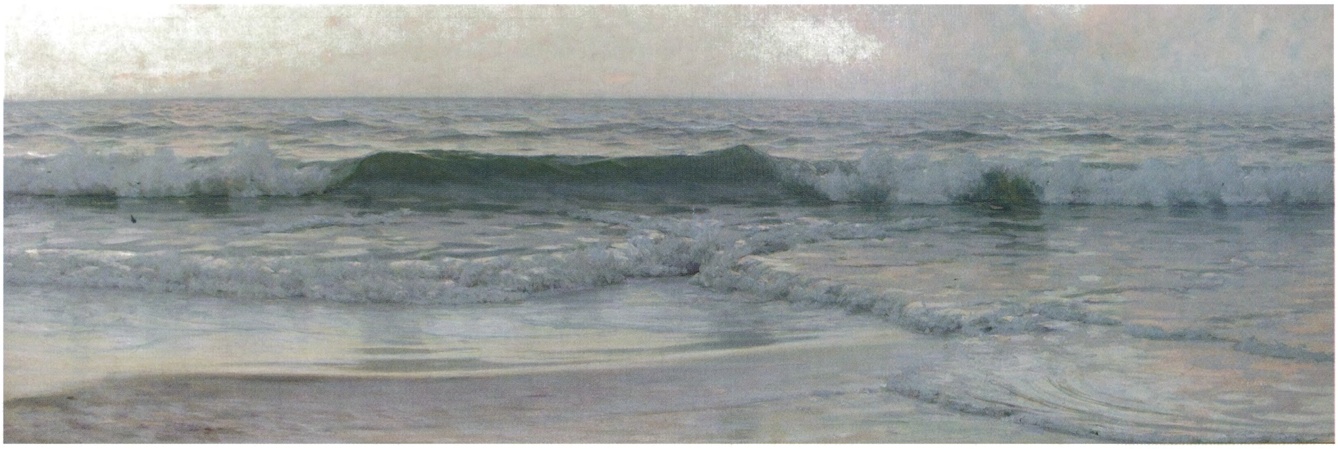


Fig. 3.41. Alexander Harrison, *The Wave*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 39¼ x 118 in. Courtesy Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Joseph E. Temple Fund.

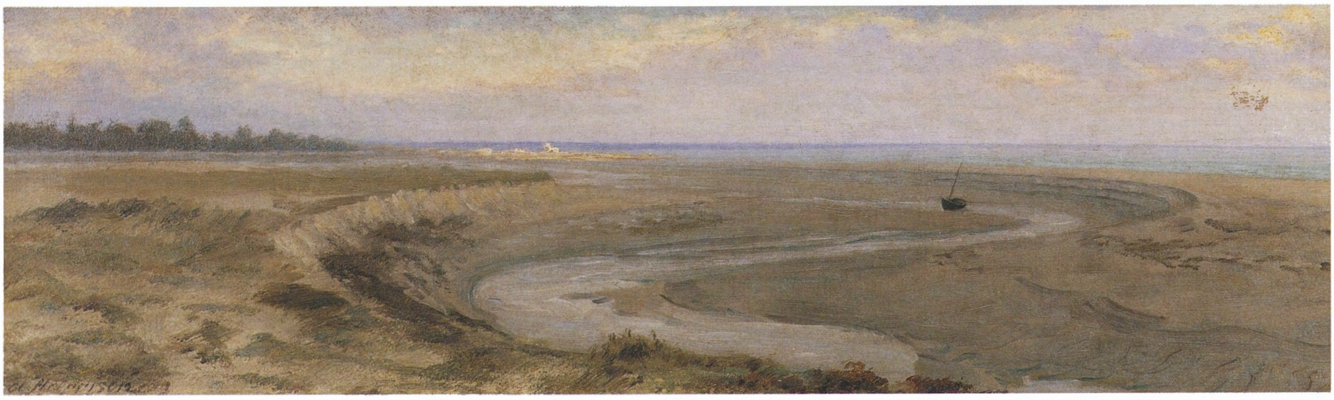


Fig. 3.42. Alexander Harrison, *Beach Tides,* c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 12 x 39 in. Private collection.

be the key to all future development of the work. From the five by ten inches to the great canvases measured by feet, he passed by means of six or seven graded sizes, each containing accumulated truth, until the next to the last, which would be a not distant approach to the final."[53] Beaux wrote later that Harrison was intent on giving the "sensation of presence" in his pictures, and "the luxury of the moment." Harrison,"had with him the sympathy and the 'moment' among his confreres, and the critics as well as the artists enjoyed what they might have called 'inhaling' his pictures as well as viewing them."[54]

A contemporary of Harrison, the artist and historian Charles Caffin, from the perspective of twenty years in 1907, found *The Wave* to have exerted a decisive effect on his generation of contemporary painters. "For the first time the true colouring of the blue water, curling over a smooth, sandy shore, had been searched into and recorded; the light that glinted on its crest, lay on the shining curve of the swell, or nestled in the hollow of the trough—each aspect had been rendered in its true relation. And the result of this truthful rendering of the passage of light over the wave was to increase the suggestion of the latter's movement. The picture was a beautiful lesson in colour, light, and movement. This trinity of qualities became the faith of the moderns. It is literally a three in one: light the source, colour the product, movement the spirit or expression ... It was the aim of the new men to effect a union of the two (art and life), to make art an expression of nature and of human life, and, incidentally, of their own temperaments, or souls. The secret of this they had discovered in the study of that element wherein things live and move and have their being. It was no longer form alone that had to be considered; but form in relation to and as affected by the surrounding, that it has in nature, of lighted atmosphere ... It is realism extended by study of what the French call the milieu—the surrounding conditions, through which the subject is viewed."[55]

Although Alexander Harrison spent almost his entire career in France, where he was recognized by the French Legion of Honor and where he taught art to countless expatriate Americans, his influence in America, along with that of his brother, Birge, was enormous. If the Munich painters galvanized the American art world with flashy handling and expressive painterly abstraction, Alexander—and Birge Harrison perhaps even to a greater degree—injected something of a Gallic precision and meticulous craftsmanship in shaping and grading tones to produce wondrous effects of felt light. No one, in France or America, could create such scintillating marines in such a concise academic style in which the facture is rarely exposed or emphasized, and the brushwork hidden, either in subtle pattern and/or absorbed into the canvas weave. Broadness and silverpoint detail combined into an eerie hyperreal synthesis. Alexander Harrison demonstrated that academic probity and infinite finesse could also be a route to the expression of profound emotion. As the artist's obituary in the *New York Times* in 1930 noted, "There was no trace of the exaggeration of certain colors in his art. He had what critics termed a 'measured and sane view' of nature and tried hard to reflect nature exactly, choosing graceful and quiet moods for his paintings. He excelled in painting sandy ground and feathery tufts of verdure that grow by the sea, the shimmer of the ocean under sunlight and the play of cloud masses along the ocean horizon in fair weather."[56] A sandy estuary depicted by Alexander Harrison, *Beach Tides,* circa 1895 (fig. 3.42), demonstrates the artist's fondness for compressed horizontal formats, which allow the rhythmic play of landforms to be rendered in sweeping patterns, grand and simple and stark. Harrison excelled at synthesizing passages of meticulous brushwork with areas of very free brushwork, verisimilitude with suggestion.

Low Tide, Brittany, circa 1890 (fig. 3.43), is an example of the ability of Harrison to render painstaking, delicate detailing of color and refracted light and yet handle them with such attention to smooth transitions of tones that the details do not read as detail but as harmonious passages of pure local color. The exquisite calligraphic textures in the paint handling—much of the pigment is absorbed into the weave of the canvas—laid out in long sensuous ribbons evoke the movement of reflections on water and of light passing across clouds. The larger rhythms

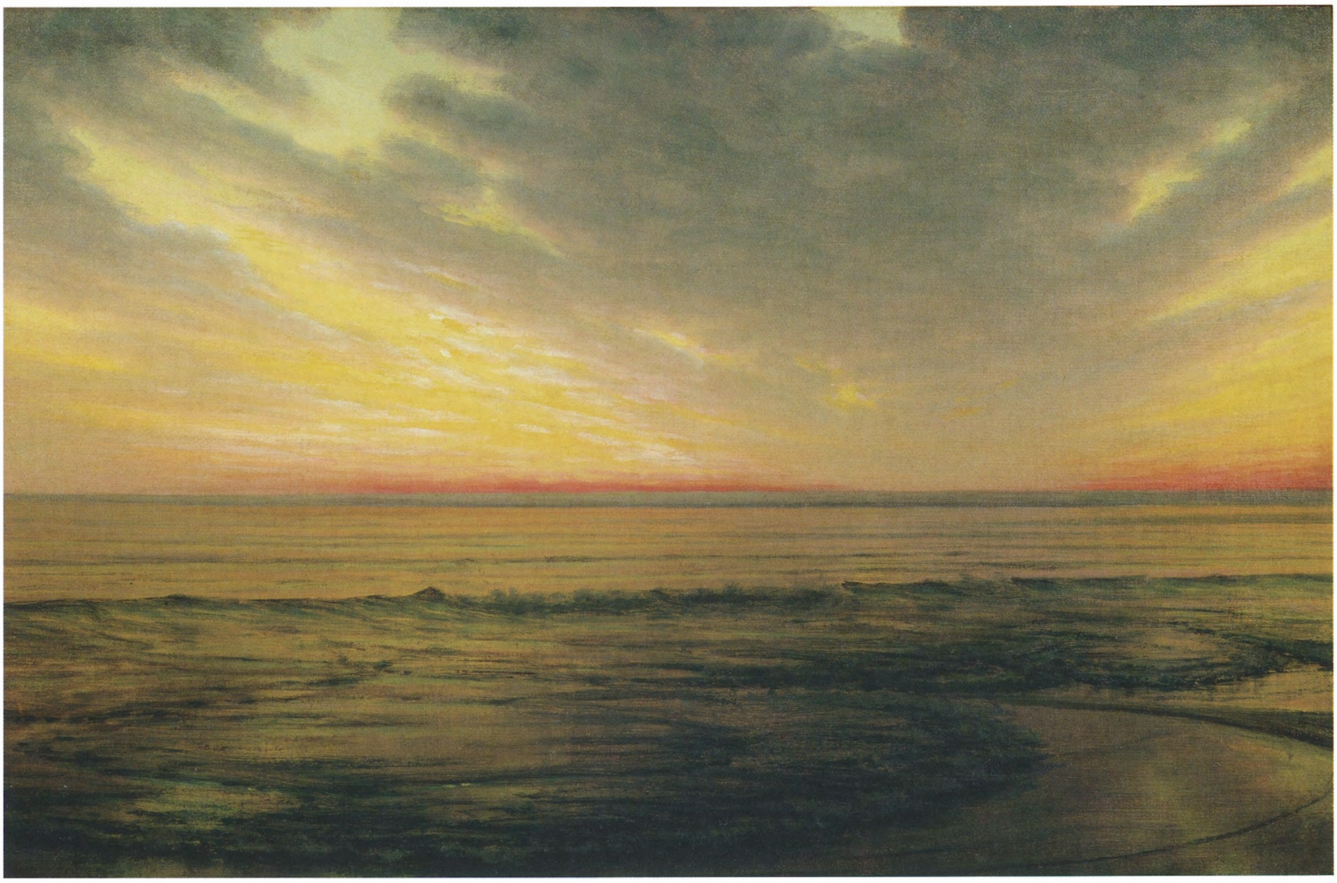


Fig. 3.43. Alexander Harrison, *Low Tide, Brittany*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 23 x 35 in. Private collection.

of water and sky pulling in counterforce to each other create kaleidoscopic patterns as dazzling as they are hypnotic: both intensely real and wonderfully strange. The American art critic and nature writer John Van Dyke, who knew Harrison's work well, perfectly captured the visual poetry of the artist in his 1898 book on natural effects, *Nature for Its Own Sake*. "If the beach is sandy and quite flat the broken wave pushes its waters in a gentle flood upward and outward in rings and half-circles, edged with white-beaded foam; and these, as they advance and pause for a few seconds, take on wonderful forms and still more wonderful colors. Especially brilliant are these flat mirrors at evening, when the waves are not running high and the heavens are bright with sunset hues. The reflection is more delicate than the sky overhead, and the colors melted and fused on the glassy surface, run together with a harmony beyond analysis. Every hue and tint are there, and all are softened and warmed by being seen in the watery mirror."[57]

Alexander Harrison, along with his brother Birge, translated the palpable feel of atmosphere, that "harmony beyond analysis," along the Breton coast—and later along the coasts of America—in ways that were a revelation to his countrymen. Charles de Kay particularly admired the way Harrison employed a keynote, which gave tone to the surrounding areas, so that entire canvases pulsed with a gamut of colored tints. "In his landscapes and marines, Alexander Harrison generally pursues the habit of painting from memory, after saturating his mind with the scene and perhaps making color notes of the chief colors. In this way he gets that large quality into some of his marines which is so imposing."[58] Both Harrison brothers became extraordinarily adept at eliciting this overall tonal quality, variously described as producing a soft glow, atmospheric, or having a restful, dreamy mood. The Harrisons were widely influential, but they were also riding the same wave of fervent interest in the atmospheric envelope that so galvanized their fellow Americans in France of the 1880s, what in turn would become by the 1890s a passion for "values."[59] Whistler, as will be seen presently, was the great master of values: the naturalistic arrangement of light and dark patterns in a painting, which is a manifestation of the precise and sensuous rendering of tonal modulations, and so in turn gives unity and visual coherence to the composition as a whole. Alexander Harrison lacked the abstract and painterly acuman of Whistler, and his production of a tonal or atmospheric envelope epitomized a rare degree of academic realism. This made his work palatable for Salon audiences—what the *New York Times* called the "measured and sane view." A painting like *Twilight*, circa 1905 (fig. 3.44), exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1905, displays a Whistlerian feel for moonlight on water, and a tenebrous quality for dark tonalities, then very much in vogue at the height of Whistler's influence

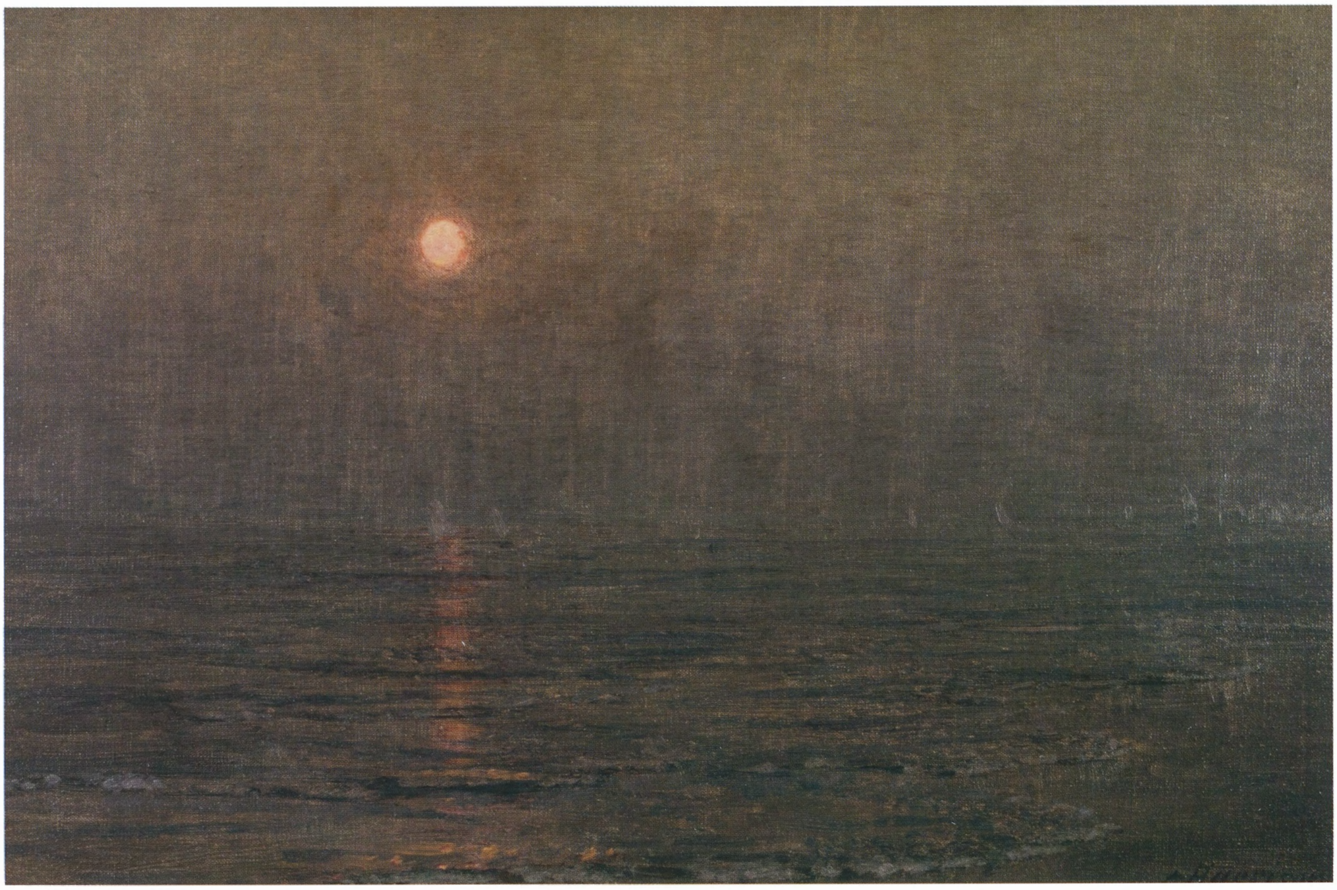


Fig. 3.44. Alexander Harrison, *Twilight*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 15 x 23 in. Private collection.

in the years immediately after 1900. Alexander Harrison's achievement, in effect, became synonymous with the exquisite depiction of tones bathed in crystalline atmosphere—the kind of hyperreal atmospheric envelope first championed by Jules Bastien-Lepage, a matter of the most refined aesthetic craftsmanship and skill of handling. In this he was the lodestar for an entire generation of American painters, initially in France and then on American shores. Harrison, as will be documented in chapter 7, also served as the model or the artist Elstir in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. His association with Proust did much to inspire the author's poetic description of landscape.

European Light: Tonalist Light and Values and the Influence of Jules Bastien-Lepage

The Harrison brothers were extraordinary sensory technicians, able to combine telling detail and broad subtleties of execution in a near-perfect depiction of felt life—their tonal forms are vibrant and activated and enclosed in pellucid atmosphere. The French art establishment acknowledged their achievements by purchasing their paintings for the national collection. Presumably, French appreciation for their technical finesse had much to do with their style's foundation in French academic sources, especially the atmospheric quality of the work of Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884), all the rage in naturalist circles of the 1880s. The Harrisons were not the only Americans to come under the spell of Bastien-Lepage. The list included Twachtman, J. Alden Weir, Arthur Hoeber, and Hugh Bolton Jones, to name only a few. Back in America, the artists no longer painted figures, much less Breton peasants, in their landscapes, as they began heeding Whistler's call for a non-narrative art. Pure landscape became the norm, while the depiction of atmosphere, the tone and light values that created poetic moods, became paramount: an experience unto itself—and valued as such. As has been seen, the historian Charles Caffin from the perspective of 1907 described the influence of Alexander Harrison in terms of a kind of hyperrealism based on the depiction of form perceived through light and atmosphere, a mood which mirrored the subjective experience of the artist. The critic John Van Dyke, in a series of lectures delivered in 1893—when the fame of the Harrisons and their followers was near its zenith, with the primary generation of Tonalist expatriates having established themselves in New York—voiced an understanding similar to Caffin's, but drew a distinction between tone as interpreted by the younger American artists returning from Europe and the English and French version, Caffin's Gallic "milieu." According to Van Dyke, Americans "regard tone as the prevailing color or intensity of a picture, as we say the tone of a landscape is gray, that of an interior piece is red, that of a still-life is yellow. Not that each note in these instances should of necessity be gray, red, or yellow, but that the general color scheme be tinctured by one of these hues sufficiently to reflect it throughout the whole piece. We may call this color tone. . . . There must be one well-defined hue or color so strong in quantity as to preponderate over all the others and give a distinct character to the whole . . . The critics, if they spoke of it at all, might add that it was 'good in tone,' perhaps meaning thereby that the predominance of the one color was well maintained, and that each note of the color-gamut was in the proper key." Van Dyke noted that the French meaning, "which is not universally accepted even in Paris, regards tone as the envelope—the whole setting and atmospheric make-up of a picture, wherein, if correctly rendered, all objects, lights, and colors take their proper places." This was certainly Bastien-Lepage's understanding. In contrast, the English comprehension of tone, in Van Dyke's view, consisted of "the proper diffusion of light as it affects the intensities of the different objects in a picture; and the right relation of objects or colors in shadow to the parts of them not in shadow and to the principal light."[60] By the 1890s, Van Dyke had detected among the national schools a difference of emphasis: the American preference for a dominant tonality, a French appreciation for an envelope of atmosphere, and a British concern for proper values, that is, a propitious distribution of varying shades of light and dark. As will be seen, Whistler, bestride all these schools, managed to encompass and synthesize the varying modes in the genius of his singular style. Van Dyke made it clear that the conceptualization of these tonal modes was not exclusive to one national school, and that the terminology was often used interchangeably. In using the term "Tonalist" as a descriptive term for a contemporary artist who uses color-tone as the main motive for his art, Van Dyke observed that this was, indeed, new to art history; in previous times, the tonal quality of a painting had been a mere adjunct to its narrative purpose and not the main attraction.[61]

If the French understanding of tone had more to do with the palpable sense of an envelope of atmosphere, it may be that French artists had more direct experience of weather conditions that produced the effect. As noted earlier, the striking atmospheric effects of the Dutch countryside, mentioned in J. Alden Weir's letter home, affected the more airy work of Twachtman in 1883–85. The atmosphere in Brittany had its own distinct microclimate, which furnished inspiration for the French naturalist painter Bastien-Lepage and his followers. Something of the experience of the climate of Brittany is found in this remembrance by the artist Arthur Hoeber of Brittany days in the early 1880s: "We left the train at Quimperlé, in Finistère. There had been rain, I remember, and it was clearing up in the west. Near the horizon was a band of brilliant light, while above there still lingered ominous dark clouds, sullen, leaden, and full of suggestion, regular Brittany weather. . . . As the summer slipped away and the days became shorter, the sunlight of August and September faded into the gray or autumn, that Brittany gray, the like of which is seen nowhere else in the world—a soft, pearly, luminous color, giving qualities of opalescent light to the landscape and enveloping everything in a tender tone of sentiment and poetry, a joy to look at and an inspiration to the painter."[62] In a *Macmillan's Magazine* article of 1896, a writer describes winter in Brittany: "It is winter in High Brittany, but winter clad in silver and pearl rather than cloaked in leaden purple flecked with snow, as it too often is across the water. For days and sometimes for weeks the weather keeps itself at stretch; there is no sun visible in all the shining dome of the sky, no touch of gold in the even radiance that fills the air; sky and sea travel to meet each other in a tender haze of gray that, when one looks at it again, is not gray but a shadowy white that glistens and shines in a pale chill splendour. It is the clear colourlessness of water in light."[63]

This was precisely the "soft, pearly, luminous color" that plein-air Tonalist artists like Hoeber tried to capture in their work, first in Brittany and later upon their return to America. The consistency of light and shadow in more overcast weather conditions benefited the artist, while bright sunlight tended to be changeable and the moving shadows distracting. Dennis Miller Bunker (1861–90), who painted some exquisite Breton landscapes in 1884, including *Larmor*, 1884 (fig. 3.45), on his return to America, complained about the difficulties of broad daylight while painting in Woodstock, Connecticut. "The days are distressingly bright for me and I long for a solemn sky and gray world. In France it is just the other way, and the sunless days are in the majority. I like them so much better to paint, because they don't change and one can paint calmly. That's a great thing, to know that you have time and your subject is to be just the same for hours. In sunlight it is never the same, the shadows which seem to be nearly in the same places when you are not painting them, really move with dreadful swiftness. . . ."[64] Likewise, when J. Frank Currier returned to Boston, he complained often about the clear, cloudless New England weather, so unlike the mellow, humid atmosphere of Schleissheim, where he had done some of his finest landscapes.[61]

This developing penchant for cloudy days had much to do with artistic proclivities and the way in which color and form read under subdued light. Charles Platt, (1861–1933), a Tonalist painter and etcher, who worked in Brittany and Holland, found Italy and the strong southern Mediterranean light uncongenial for landscape, resulting in "a succession of pictures, but not the kind I want to paint."[66] According to art historian Erica Hirschler: "He found the southern landscape, with its brilliant sun and deep, rich colors, appealing and unusual but unsuited to his aesthetic temperament, which called for harmony and balance."[67] Platt, like Twachtman (and

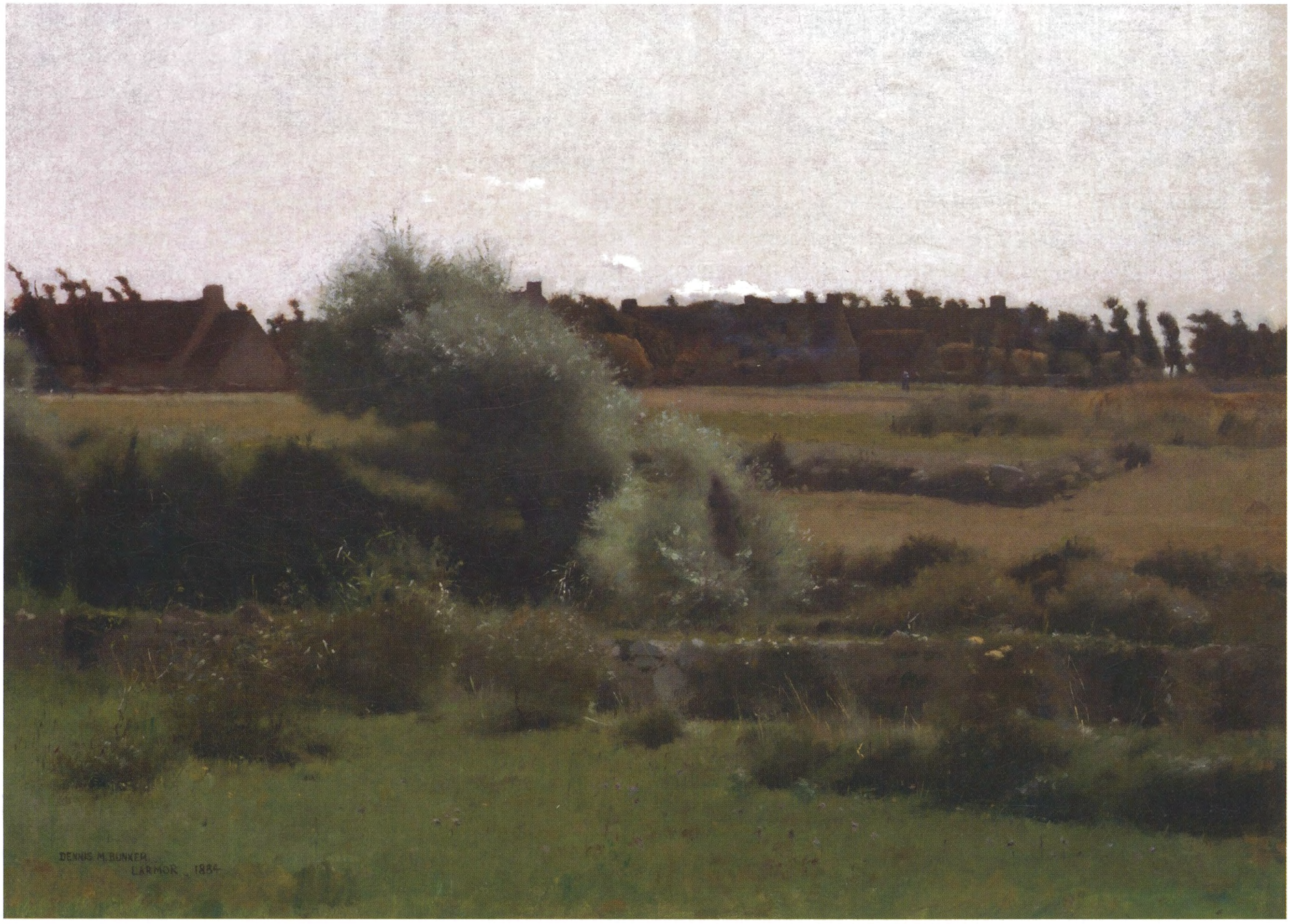


Fig. 3.45. Dennis Miller Bunker, *Larmor*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 18 x 25¾ in. Courtesy Adelson Galleries.

later, Henry Ward Ranger) and other Americans who worked in Holland, was beguiled by the soft humid atmosphere of the low-lying landscape and by the Hague school of painters—Jacob Maris and Josef Israels, who interpreted the Dutch waterworld with evanescent silver tones, being the most prominent. Stressing tone over color and the poetry of gray, the Hague School represented a link to the great seventeenth-century Dutch School landscapists such as Jacob van Ruysdael and Meindert Hobbema. Platt was one of the few Americans to manage the effect of shimmering tonality in the etching medium; his *Old Houses Near Bruges*, 1884–88 (fig. 3.46), is a masterpiece of technical finesse, employing delicate silverpoint hatching and raised burr to achieve softly blurred edges and the evocation of muted sunlight. Platt's affinity for the softer light of Europe remained a telling influence in his art on his return to America in 1887. Howard Russell Butler, who was more of the Impressionist persuasion, found it strange, the craze among American painters in Brittany for painting "ugly faces in gloomy light," and, "a tendency among young artists to avoid sunlight effects, preferring the most uncomfortable, chilly, somber days to those which certainly give one the most pleasure out of doors. . . ."[68] Whistler, too, who was thoroughly enamored of misty and moody weather—a true Londoner in that regard—wrote to his dealer from Brittany in 1893, complaining about the relentless sunshine. "I have had enough of the country—Beautiful it might all have been perhaps if it had not been for the devilish fine weather!—I suppose it is six weeks since it has rained—and all the tourists in the world must have been enchanted with the brazen sky and tin sea—nothing for the painter—nothing!—at least not for this one."[69] Whistler was not alone. American painters in the early 1880s

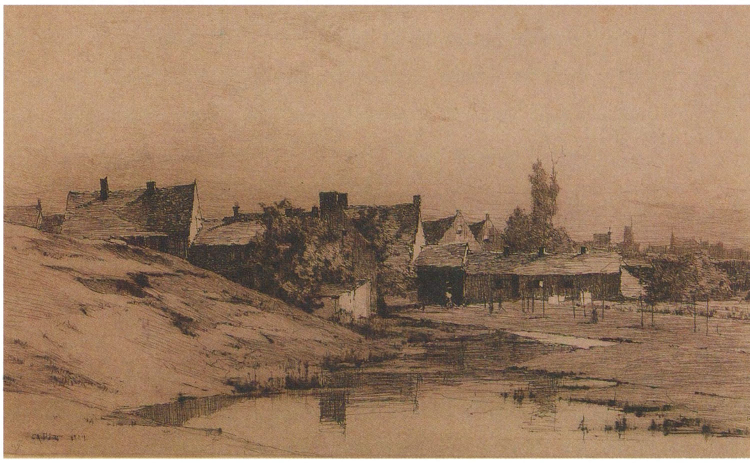


Fig. 3.46. Charles Platt, *Old Houses Near Bruges*, 1884–88. Etching, 10 x 17 in. Private collection.

often chose French sites specifically for the abundance of gray days, the overcast weather that stabilized landscape forms and allowed them to delve into the minute vibration of like tones, eliciting the sumptuous feeling for the hidden energies of metamorphosis in nature.

This dichotomy or aesthetic hurdle was noted by John La Farge in his 1893 lectures to American students at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, addressing the artistic conundrums of inherited artistic traditions and the differing lighting conditions of America and Europe. "Hence the difficulties of the painter who brings to this study in the open air of the New World—harsh, clear, light-coloured, crystalline—not the principles but the methods he has learned in studios of grey and rainy France, or the dry formulas of school-bred Germany. And if in the face of ever-changing nature, he is overburdened by that part of himself which has hardened like his bones, and he repaints his old likings of studio practice—how excusable is he in objecting to the newer impressions of others: the works of others who are not carrying as a weight the same memories of practice and sight which he has."[70] Thus did the generation of artists returning from Europe in the 1870s and 1880s struggle to fit their training and sensibilities to the exigencies of the American scene—so much so that an American critic in 1884 could grumble about the "monotonous gray French atmosphere," in an exhibited painting.[71]

It is little wonder that Tonalist artists who cut their teeth on the somber light in Brittany, or elsewhere in Europe, would retain a preference when they returned to America to paint landscapes under similar atmospheric conditions, most readily available to them at dawn and dusk or in the fall and winter seasons, or along the coast or inland hills where fog often tinctured the air. But this preference was also rooted in underlying artistic choices about the particular quality or focus of their landscape art. Tonalist artists like the Harrison brothers were interested not only in the effects of light on landscape but also in the formal structure of landscape itself—its abstract qualities, the design and pattern, the nuance and telling detail, especially the symbolic form that reads more explicitly in subdued natural light. The artist and historian Samuel Isham described the experience of light the Tonalists sought, many of them under the influence of Bastien-Lepage. "Some of the older masters, from the Holland school down to Millet, had given the enveloping quality of the atmosphere, though they had retained the warm studio tones; but it was discovered that shadows under the soft, misty sky of France were not of any one fixed color, but infinitely varied with the varying light, and the 'Plein airists' insisted that the truth should be given in all its complexity. Bastien and his friends applied to outdoor nature the minute, sensitive draftsmanship that they had gained in the *ateliers*. There were no formulas, no traditions for the new school; everything had to be discovered by the artist and translated by him somehow into paint. In all these explorations [Alexander] Harrison was the leader. He looked at nature with an eye unclouded by recollections of the old masters and wonderfully responsive to the delicate variations of color."[72]

The Harrisons and others in their circle, especially J. Alden Weir, were, as young artists, utterly taken with Bastien-Lepage's naturalistic style of painting, which was almost exclusively figurative. The Frenchman created a vogue for painting humble peasants and near photo-realistic portraits in natural light, at the same time obsessively recording the precise look and feeling of the outdoor envelope of atmosphere, mostly the soft light of late afternoon. Bastien-Lepage's *The Thames, London*, 1882 (fig. 3.47), displays the artist's extraordinary ability to capture the tactile sensation of deep pellucid atmosphere, here in a near-homage to Whistler's foggy Thames. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, even after his untimely death from cancer in 1884, Bastien-Lepage inspired a cult-like following. Alexander Harrison would include Bastien-Lepage along with Gérôme as his teacher in his Salon offerings of 1886, and his Brittany landscapes, especially the scintillating feeling of natural light, take their inspiration from the French master. Alexander Harrison's *A River in France*, circa 1890 (fig. 3.48), shows how even in his more traditional landscapes, Harrison reveled in the textures of natural forms when seen through a palpable envelope of air. There is some evidence that Bastien-Lepage and his followers used photography to obtain their hyperrealistic natural effects and the uncanny sense of poised movement in their figurative works. At a time when the Parisian ateliers were beginning to stress a broader, more value-oriented execution in painting (another aspect of the French understanding of tone as an airy envelope), Bastien-Lepage was so taken with the beauty of details in nature that his work seems cluttered even by the standards of contemporary taste. Some Americans of a stong academic bent, like Daniel Ridgeway Knight, Charles Sprague Pearce, and Gari Melchers, fell wholesale under the sway of Bastien-Lepage; they took up his peasant genre subjects and spent their careers as expatriate artists reproducing ersatz versions for the American market. In general, for the likes of J. Alden Weir, the Harrison brothers, Hugh Bolton Jones, and the most talented Tonalists, the bucolic peasant formulas represented only a passing phase in their early careers, while the passion for depth of atmosphere remained. On returning to America, most dropped figures from their landscapes and developed along the indigenous lines of pure landscape favored by J. Francis Murphy, Charles Melville Dewey, Alexander Wyant, and George Inness. The Americans integrated much of Bastien-Lepage's technical style into their work: the soft atmospheric envelope of air, a carefully modulated degree of linearity and definition of form, the use of selective but telling detail, a high horizon to dramatize foreground elements, a subtle sense of kinetic energy—of poised or frozen motion

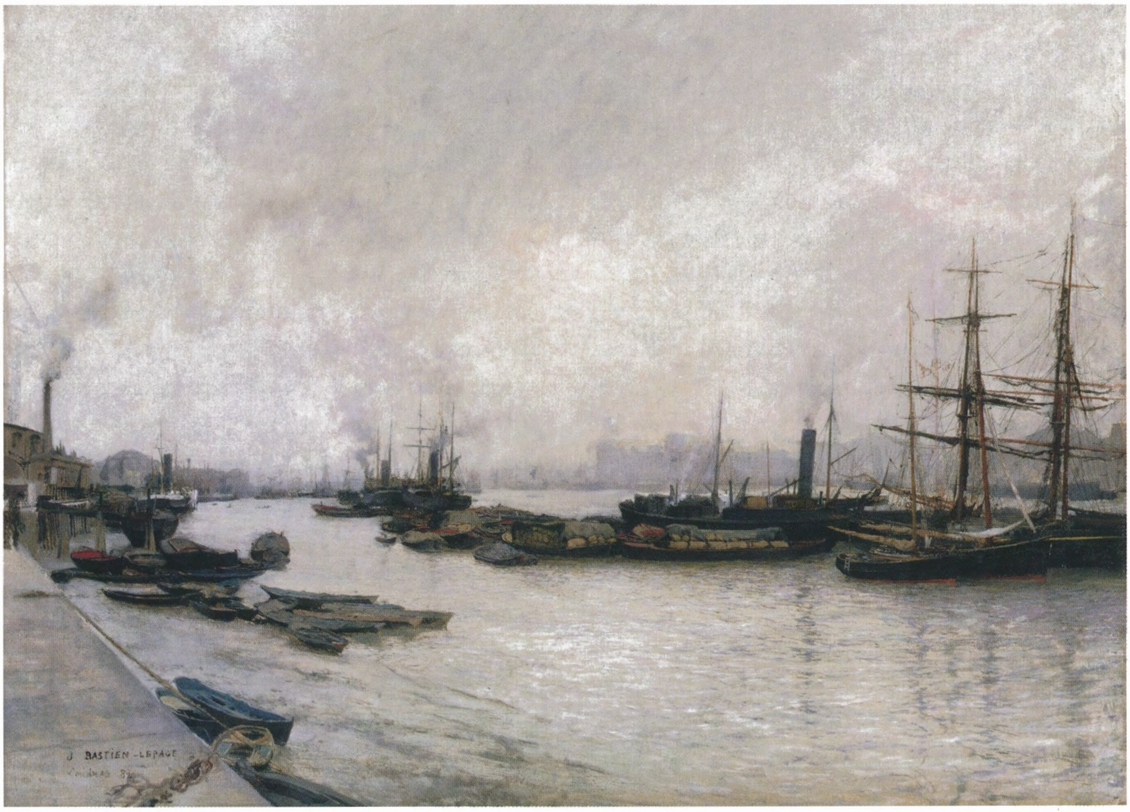


Fig. 3.47. Jules Bastien-Lepage, *The Thames, London*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 22 5/16 x 30 3/8 in. Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection, 1917.

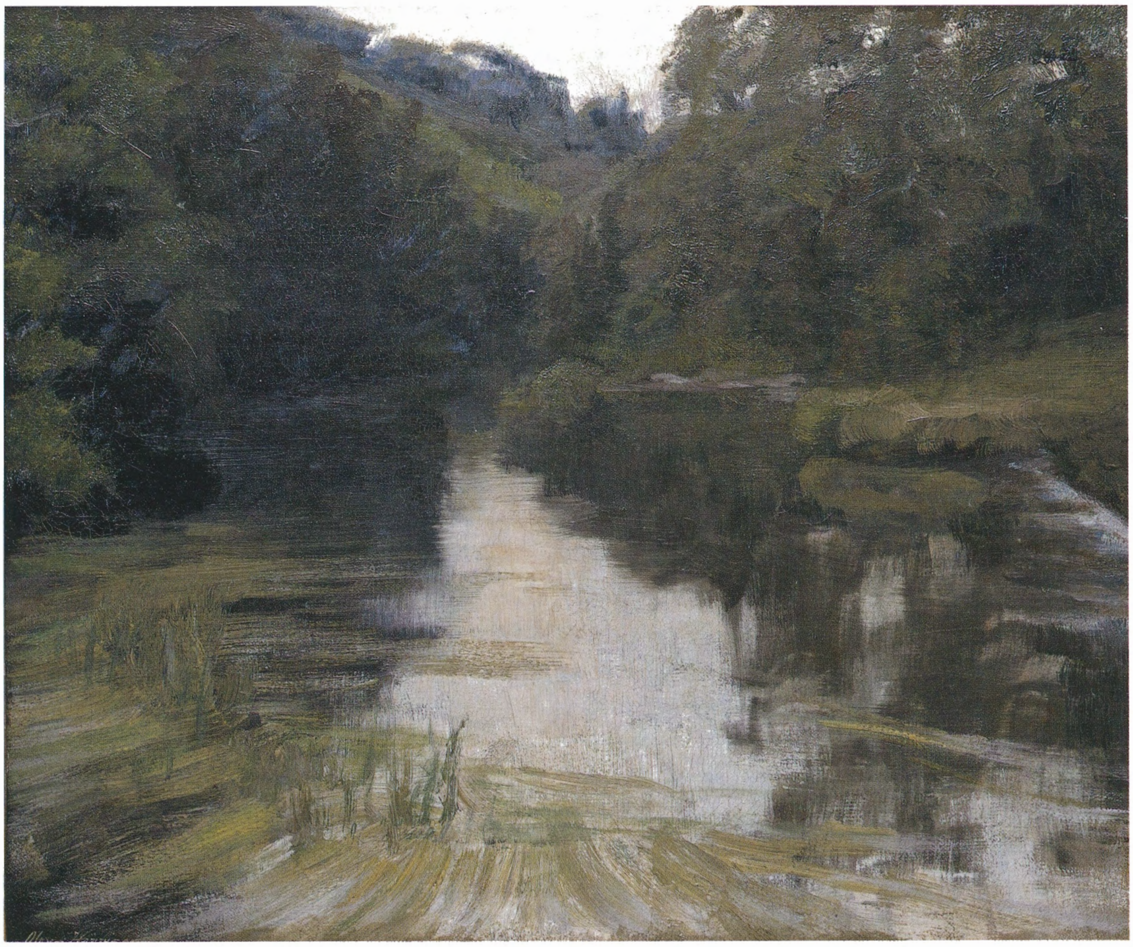


Fig. 3.48. Alexander Harrison, *A River in France,* c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 18 x 22 in. Courtesy Butler Fine Art.

inherent in natural forms (sea, clouds, trees)—and a sense of the mysterious in nature. Along with these precepts, the luminous atmospheric quality of Bastien-Lepage most likely stimulated the use of glazing in American landscape painting, a technique often employed to approximate the effect of soft, moisture-laden air, especially in late afternoon or dusk. It is no wonder that Bastien-Lepage's great painting, *Joan of Art*, 1879 (now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art), was exhibited at the fourth annual exhibition of the Society of American Artist in 1881: in the early 1880s, Bastien-Lepage was virtually the patron saint of the society. His legacy—he was almost forgotten within ten years of his death—was a kind of contra-Impressionism, a non-scientific yet meticulous observation of the effects of natural light on local color. For American landscape painting after 1880, the legacy lingered as a deep feeling for the underlying integrity of the landscape armature and a heightened sensitivity to lucent light. This reverence for the concrete organic forms of nature, though veiled in a subtle soft-edged tonality, would remain a hallmark of American Tonalism well into the 1920s.

Birge Harrison (1859–1929): The Techniques of Vibration and Refraction in Atmospheric Landscape Painting

Although Alexander Harrison was the more famous brother in his time, winning gold medals across Europe and running his own school in Paris, Birge Harrison probably overshadows him today. In 1882, Birge Harrison was already a member of the Society of American Artists, and by 1900, he was revered in America for his Tonalist winterscapes—many of Quebec, Canada—his teaching at the Art Students League in Woodstock, and subsequently his highly influential 1909 book on landscape painting, which went through many editions and codified the lessons and aspirations of his generation of professional artists. Birge Harrison's first major triumph came at the Paris Salon of 1882 when his *November*, 1881 (fig. 3.49), was purchased by the French government. Ostensibly a genre subject in the vein of Bastien-Lepage, the predominant interest is landscape; the painting is luminous with vibrant colors, a scintillating formal design, and a unity produced by the envelope of almost palpable atmosphere. The detailed carpet of autumn leaves is tipped upward in the foreground as if to better display the detailed patterning of the leaves, thus dramatizing the peasant figure with her rake as she turns at the appearance of rabbits in the middle ground. One can read into the painting numerous narratives and allegories on autumnal themes of death and decay, certainly appropriate for the tastes of the times; however, this was far from the artist's primary concern. *November* is a tour de force, encompassing the full range of Tonalist strategies evolved by 1880 to produce a landscape of ravishing beauty based on a near perfect integration of idea and emotion. The mood that Harrison imparts emanates from the play or dance of juxtaposed autumnal colors—what Harrison called "refraction," which in turn creates a visual sense of movement, a sensation further enhanced by the "vibration" of complementary tones, as warm undertones bleed through and jostle the cool overtones.

In his book on landscape painting, Birge Harrison wrote about the genesis of *November*, ostensibly to underline the importance of allowing the student enough latitude in his

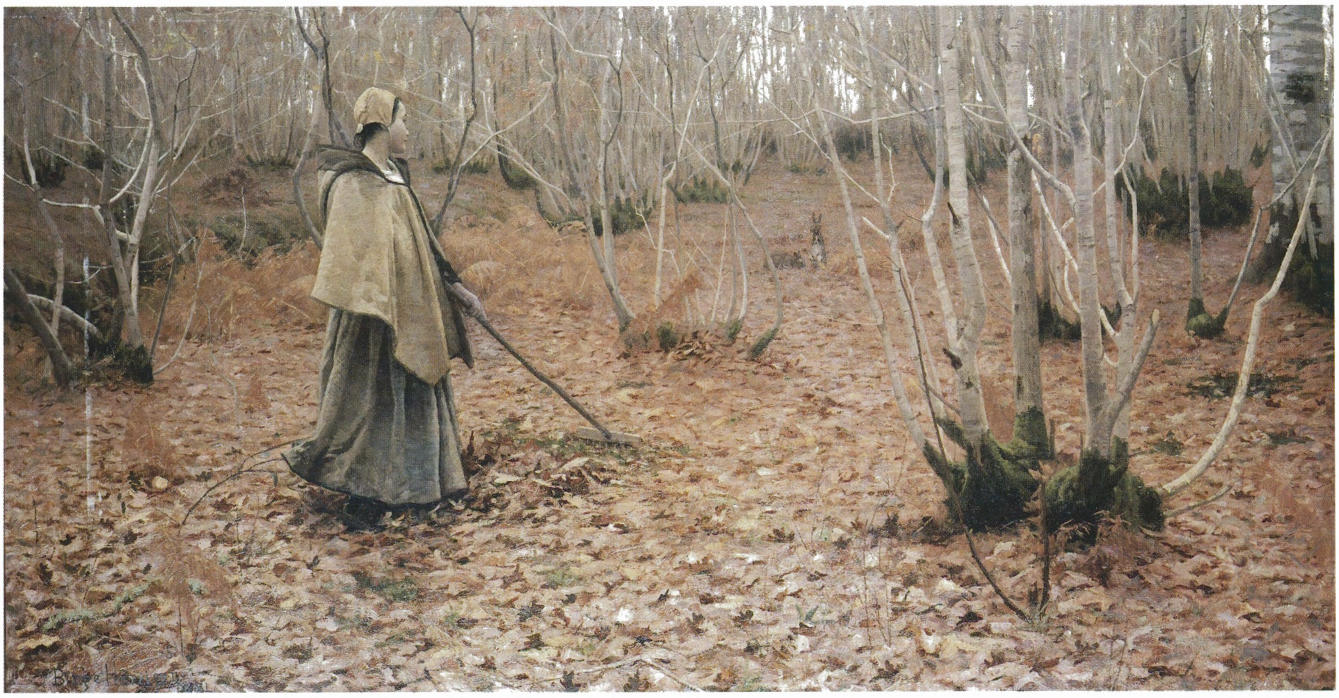


Fig. 3.49. Birge Harrison, *November*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 52 x 97⅝ in. Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie de Rennes.

studies so that his innate proclivities—temperament, character, and sincerity—could blossom in face of the dry program of technical competence taught in the academy. He noted that after six years at the École des Beaux-Arts he had gone to Brittany (presumably to join his brother) to work up some submissions for the Salon. Birge had studied with Carolus-Duran, the teacher of John Singer Sargent, and had probably absorbed through him an appreciation for Velásquez, more in terms of atmospheric quality than of the flashy brushwork that Sargent employed to fame and fortune. Two years into his Breton stay, after many unsuccessful attempts, Birge had reached a stalemate working on *November*. He wrote of his frustrations in his book on landscape painting: "The work was well toward completion. It was, I knew, well drawn, sound in values, and at least as true and delicate in color as the average picture. It was an honest endeavor, at any rate, and my very best; yet deep in my heart I felt that it was a failure, like all the others. But the heart-breaking part of it was that I could not guess *why* it was a failure." He goes on to explain that a friend, a Scandinavian painter, dropped by and on seeing *November* told him "it was too bad it was not a damned sight better." The artist showed Harrison what was missing by painting over an area of his canvas. " . . . It was as if a window had been opened in the center of the canvas. [The Scandinavian artist's] work vibrated and sparkled with light and with atmosphere, while mine lay flat and dead. It was also as if a window had been opened in my own soul. [He] had shown me the secret of atmospheric painting—had made clear to me in a single lucid demonstration the importance of vibration and refraction in landscape painting. I threw aside the canvas upon which I was at work and started another, which I carried through with such enthusiasm and verve as I can never remember having put into another work—using, of course, the new knowledge which had come to me so opportunely."[73]

Vibration and refraction were precisely the keys to the success of the Tonalist school and, in Birge Harrison's reckoning, to the revolutionary discoveries and innovations of his generation. "The most splendid achievement of the nineteenth century in painting, and its best legacy to the future, was the discovery of the technical means by which the scintillating effect of living light could be transferred to the dead and rigid surface of the canvas. Of this the old masters had absolutely no conception. The discovery belongs to our generation, and is a distinction of which any age might well be proud. . . . Without it landscape art had hardly been possible—landscape art, that is, in the modern sense in which we know it."[74] Harrison traces the pedigree of the pearly vibrating light of Tonalism from Constable and the Barbizon School to the present, contrasting the two competing approaches in his day: Impressionism and Tonalism. Of the spot-and-dash method of the Impressionists he writes: "It must be clear to any one that this system, while giving beautiful results in the way of luminosity, does not logically follow the forms of nature, or reproduce her surfaces, and it must therefore be regarded as an imperfect and a temporary manner which is destined to be superseded in time by some more supple and expressive technique." Capturing the dancing, broken color in nature—the vibration—lay at the heart of Tonalist painting. The Tonalist method of achieving vibration, "adopted by the vast majority of our best landscape painters is one in which vibration is obtained by means of a cool overtone painted freshly into a warm undertone, care being taken not to mix or blend the two coats and not to cover up completely the undertone, rather letting it show through brokenly all over the canvas; the vibration being secured, naturally, by the separate play of the warm and the cold notes."[75] The distinction drawn by Harrison is that the Impressionism developed by Monet, painting with Renoir and Manet at Argenteuil in 1874, is based on the vibration of light caused by the juxtaposition of pure pigments, while Tonalism is focused on the vibration and interaction of complementary tones.

Art historian David Sellin further distinguishes the methods of the Tonalists and Impressionists as they developed in the 1870s. "The typical plein-air [Tonalist] painter selected a gray day, avoiding direct sunlight. The envelope of even light eliminated strong contrasts of light and dark as well as of color. Harmony in value from light to shade, but no deep shadow, permitted transcription of nature's local colors without adding black below the middle of the value scale. The typical Impressionist painter revels in the complementary colors in shadow 'demanded' of the retina by the more intense color of the adjacent area illuminated by the sun. Form and mass and local color dissolve and black does not exist—theoretically neither does white, but theories are seldom tyrannical in art."[76]

Harrison found the Tonalist mode to be "thoroughly logical," supple, and responsive, allowing the artist great latitude for the display of individual approaches. He noted a crucial difference between Barbizon and Tonalist painting: Barbizon painters used a traditional brown rub-in for undertones, which Harrison warned his students against, writing that the brown underpainting in many Barbizon canvases bled through to the surface and spoiled "some of the finest pictures on earth."[77]

Harrison's second key component is what he called "refraction," somewhat akin to the French understanding of what constitutes the envelope of atmosphere in a painting, and the British sense of light–dark values (as discussed earlier with Van Dyke). Refraction is "that intimate effect of one mass of color or value upon its adjoining mass which results in the 'lost-edge,' and a general diffusion of tone, thus giving to pictures their atmospheric quality." According to Harrison, refraction is fundamentally a visual phenomenon; it is the ordinary and natural circumstance produced by the human eye when focused on a particular object—an object on the periphery of the focal point becomes blurred and edges are softened. "This is refraction; and as the eye sees it, so, without question, the hand should paint it."[78]

Harrison singles out Whistler's use of overall refraction in his Nocturnes, which also relied on the use of warm grounds to harmonize and unify the latter's compositions. "Whistler, in fact, was past master of the art of refraction, its one great and supreme prophet; and it is to the consummate and most artistic use which he made of this one quality that his work owes all of that emotional, appealing, and poetic charm which is its distinguishing trait."[79]

What Birge Harrison learned from Bastien-Lepage and others in the early 1880s in terms of atmosphere, refraction, and vibration, and painting under overcast skies, was shared by a score of the finest Tonalist artists of his generation. Of the older generation, George Inness most likely picked up similar insights either in Italy and France in the mid 1870s, or from the returning Americans in the early 1880s, who probably reinforced new directions in his art. Inness spoke to this development when he commented to his wife in 1881 on his use of more muted cool colors in his recent paintings. "All these pictures are painted with very gray colors, which I find give me the truest tone of nature, so that, although they are very rich, they are full of air."[80] And as Birge Harrison had noted, Whistler was the master and prophet in terms of the development of rich atmospheric tonalities; his example only confirmed and reinforced what the expatriate Americans had discovered in Europe, along with his innovations in design, decorative compositional formats, and flat patterning based on Japanese models.

Charles Harold Davis (1856–1933)

The French work of Charles Harold Davis, executed between 1880 and 1890, represents a singular achievement. Davis did for landscape what Alexander Harrison had first achieved in marine painting: the creation of a lucid atmospheric envelope in which the sumptuous tonalities of the landforms seem to have a living, breathing presence. His influence on the Tonalist movement in the 1880s and 1890s was on a par with the Harrison brothers. Born in Amesbury, Massachusetts, and later resident in Boston, Davis was another New Englander stirred by William Morris Hunt's enthusiasm for Millet. Visiting an exhibition of Barbizon painting at the Boston Athenaeum as a young boy, he recalled the experience as "an artistic awakening and a revelation, as he suggested: '. . . for are we not converted and born again in ways mental as well as spiritual,' as 'light flash suddenly into a hitherto darkened soul?'"[81] Such an Emersonian epiphany was first translated to full effect in France, in the small town of Fleury, where Davis "lost his heart." Like Hunt before him and the great masters of the Tonalist landscape, Davis could abide just so much academic training—a year or so with Gustave Boulanger and Jules-Joseph Lefebvre—before he moved to the village of Fleury near Barbizon, where he lived until 1890. *Haystacks*, circa 1885 (fig. 3.50), represents an enchanted merging of an Emersonian sensibility with the French naturalism of Jules Bastien-Lepage and the technical finesse of the academy. One of the first works Davis produced in France, *Haystacks* has a simplicity, poise, and feeling for light and air that is seemingly innocent but at the same time very sophisticated. He shows his brushstrokes in the painted details, yet the marks read less as detail and more as sumptuous expressions of medium, amalgamating the material and spiritual, the quotidian and the inner exuberance of the artist. Although initially inspired by Barbizon landscapes, Davis's work in France read more as projections of his emotions than renditions of place. *Evening*, 1886 (fig. 3.51), displays the artist's fascination for the transient effects of dusk, which transform the landscape, dramatizing natural forms and creating mysterious soft-edged patterns. The eloquent arrangement of landscape elements remained Davis's primary goal. *The Brook: Effect at Evening*, 1890 (fig. 3.52), represents the culmination of his French period. Every facet of the composition, from the subtle interaction of tones, to the graceful form patterns and passages of muted color, to the ethereal light that bathes the whole draws the eye of the viewer into a world at once otherworldly and tantalizingly real. No other American artist so perfectly mastered the French idea of atmospheric envelope, and Davis had Salon prizes in 1887 and 1889 to prove it. Returning to America in 1890, Davis moved away from his subtle landscape poetics bathed in crystalline light, opting for a more distinctly American style of Tonalism, which included decorative patterning, sensuous tonal brushwork, and a Whistlerian elegance, the fashion in America in the decade before 1900. Davis's French landscapes, like Alexander Harrison's marines, which succeeded so brilliantly in capturing the fugitive effects of refracted light at dusk, were enormously influential in American exhibitions of the 1880s and later, re-emphasizing the French sense of tonal envelope in the development of the Tonalist movement of those decades. His inclusion in the progressive Society of American Artists in 1886 is a sure indicator of his early prominence.

The success of Davis and the Harrison brothers in forging a distinctive style on French shores only points up the difficulties of such achievements. Many other Americans who worked in Brittany brought along their own take on the landscape and weather along the sea-blown coast, and in varying degrees—some more successfully than others—translated various aspects of their experience to landscape work on home ground. An exchange among the American painter Edward Emerson Simmons (*Night, St. Ives Bay*, 1889, fig. 3.53), Alexander Harrison, and Jules Bastien-Lepage in Concarneau

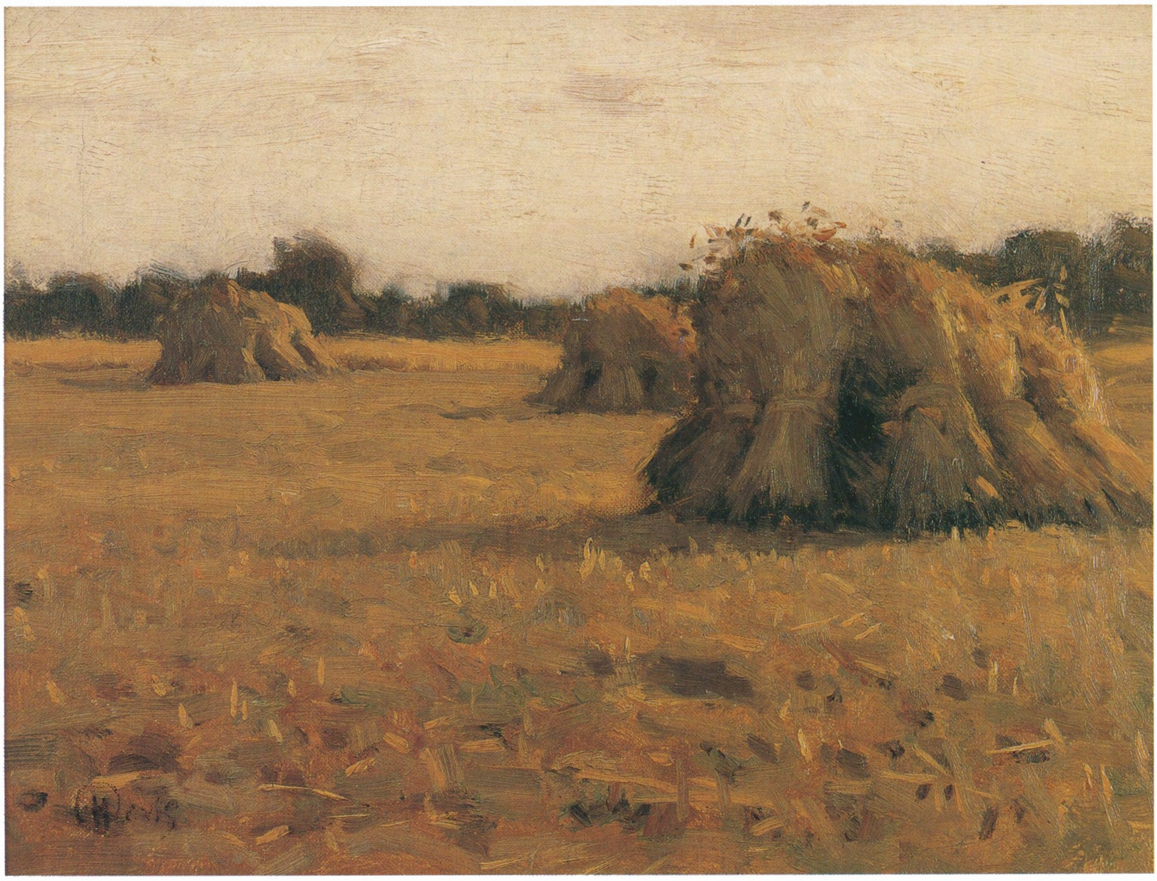


Fig. 3.50. Charles Harold Davis, *Haystacks*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 10 x 13 in. Private collection.

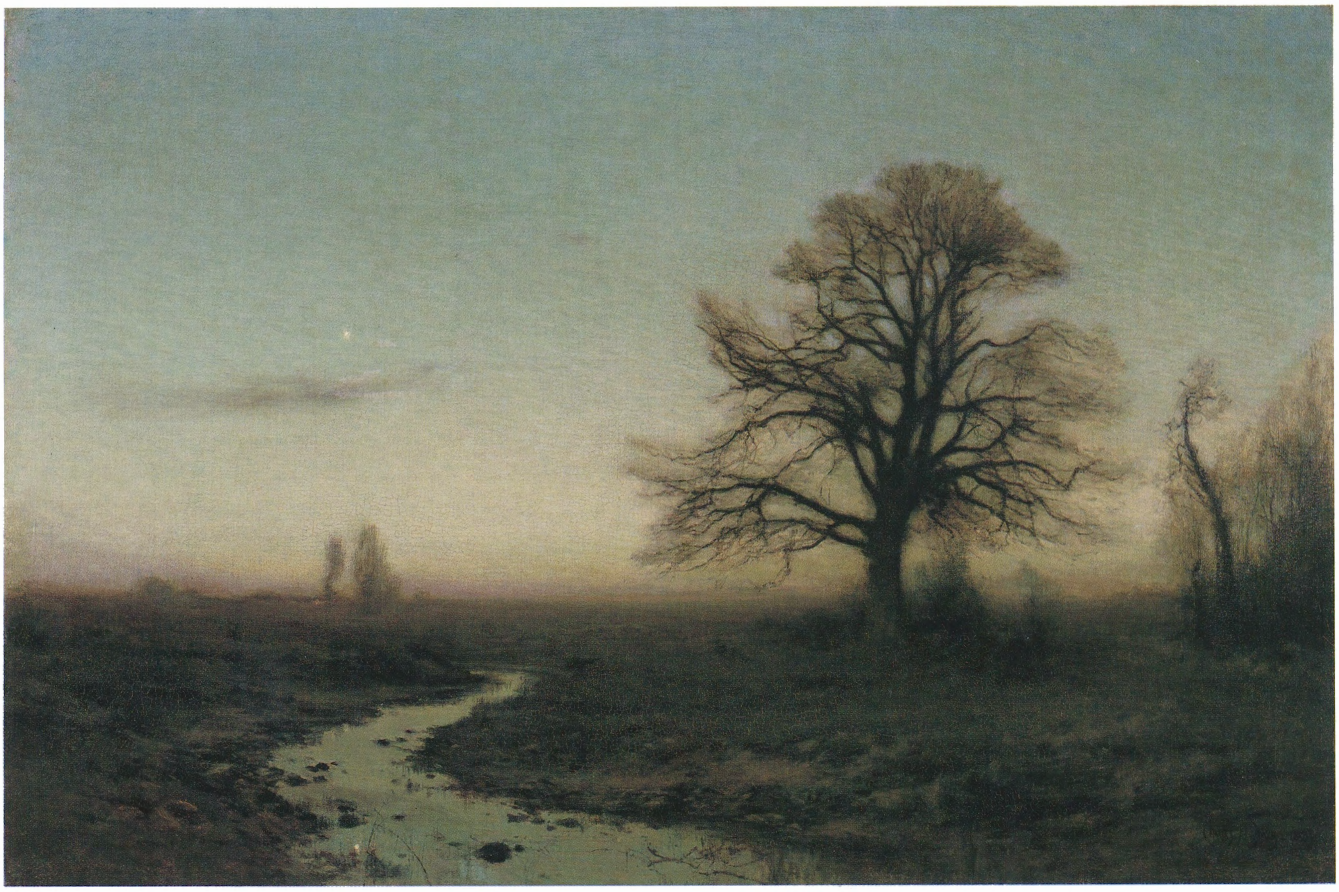


Fig. 3.51. Charles Harold Davis, *Evening*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 38 x 58 in. Manoogian Collection.

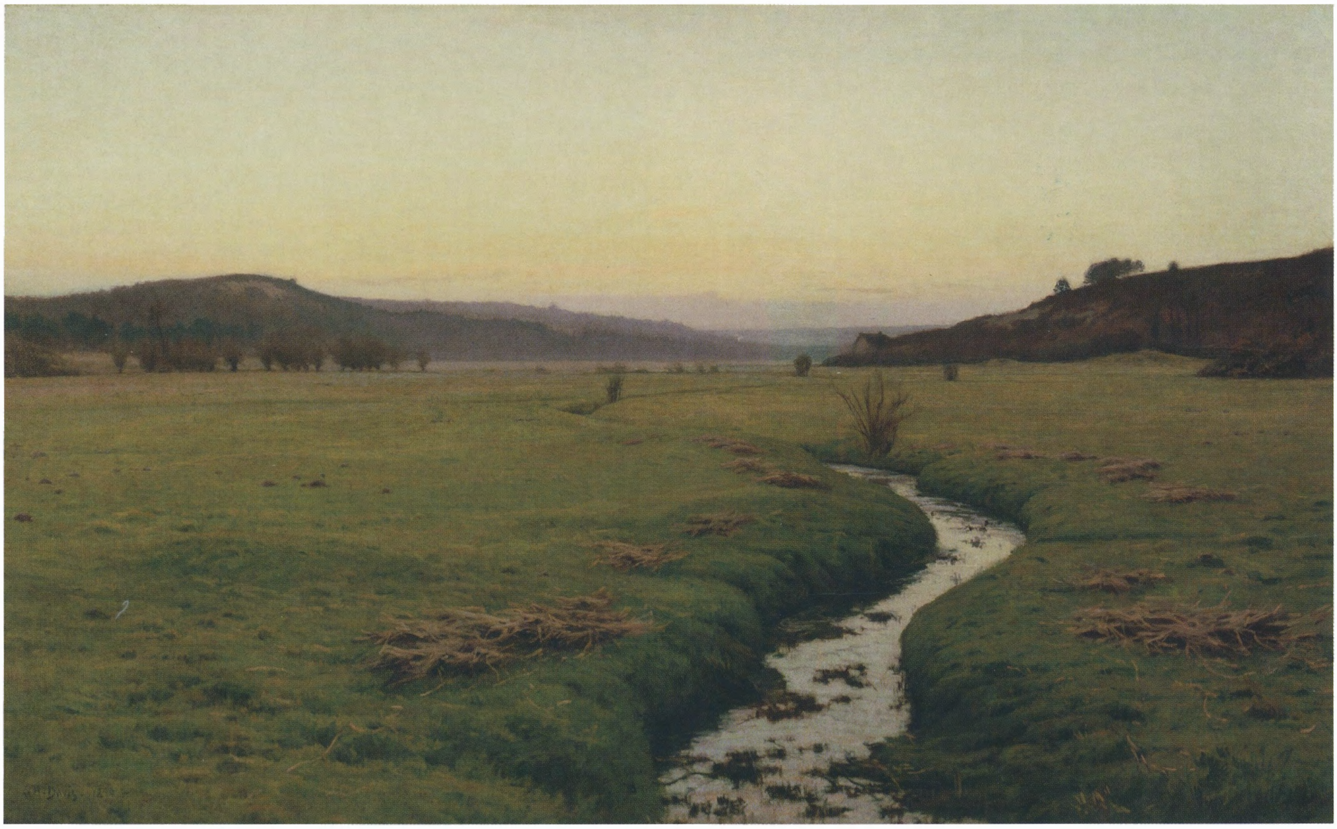


Fig. 3.52. Charles Harold Davis, *The Brook: Effect at Evening*, 1890. Oil on canvas, mounted on wood, 71 x 114½ in. Courtesy Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Joseph E. Temple Fund.

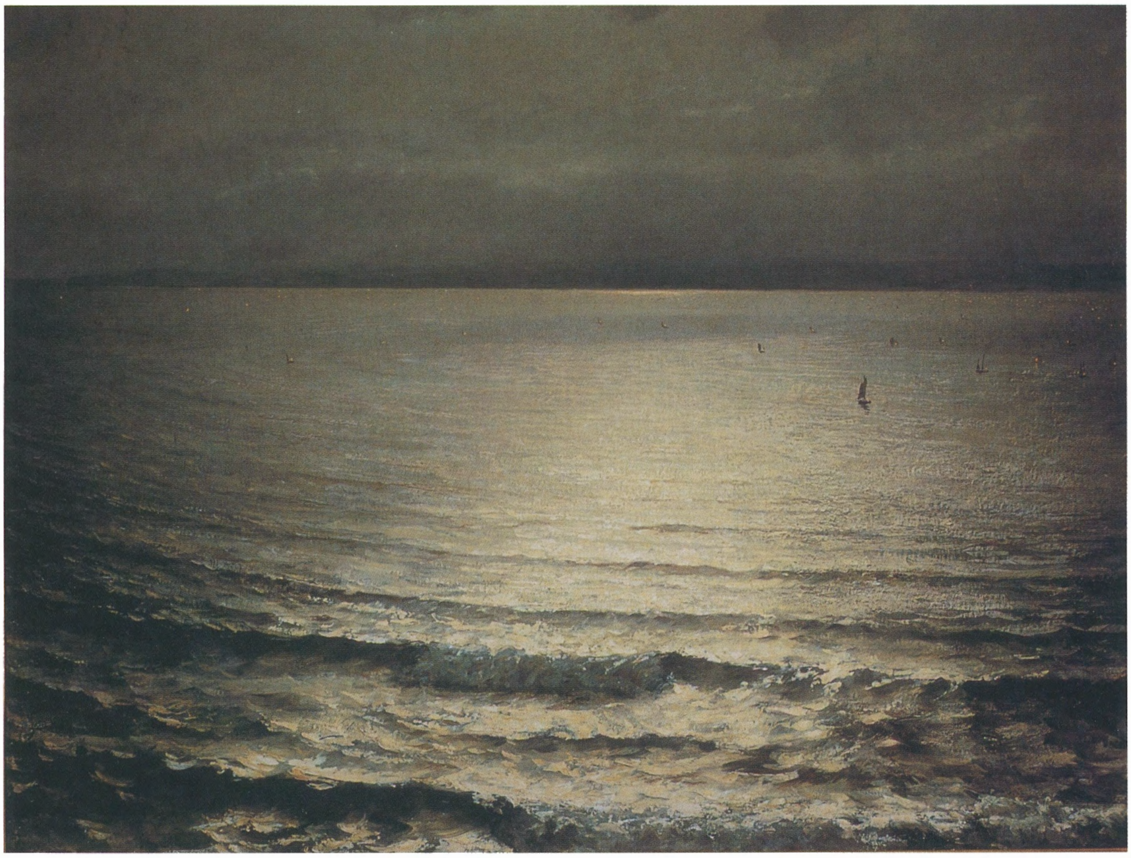


Fig. 3.53. Edward Emerson Simmons, *Night, St. Ives Bay*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 50 x 66 in. Collection of Mr. Hardwick Simmons, New York.

offers an insight into the sometimes treacherous path the Americans had to negotiate between various stylistic options—in this case, broad versus detailed handling, as well as the often conflicting advice of influential teachers. In his memoirs, Simmons recounts their conversation.

> "M. Bastien," I said (no one ever called him Lepage) "we have all been taught by Le Febvre, Boulanger, Cabanel, and Durand to *ebaucher* our subject broadly and put in only the details that are absolutely necessary. I saw you to-day painting every slate on that roof for its own sake. How about it?"
>
> He laughed.
>
> "I have tried all those different methods, but none of them got me what I saw; so now I do everything as truthfully as I am able, then take my picture to Paris, where, in my studio, away from nature, I can consider it broadly and remove all the unnecessary detail."
>
> "Yes," said Harrison, "but when we younger men see your picture in the Salon we don't think you have done what you say you do."
>
> He threw his hands in the air.
>
> "*Helas! Helas! Sacré Nom de Dieu! Vous avez raison.* I am so much in love with it when I see it in my studio that I cannot bear to touch it."[82]

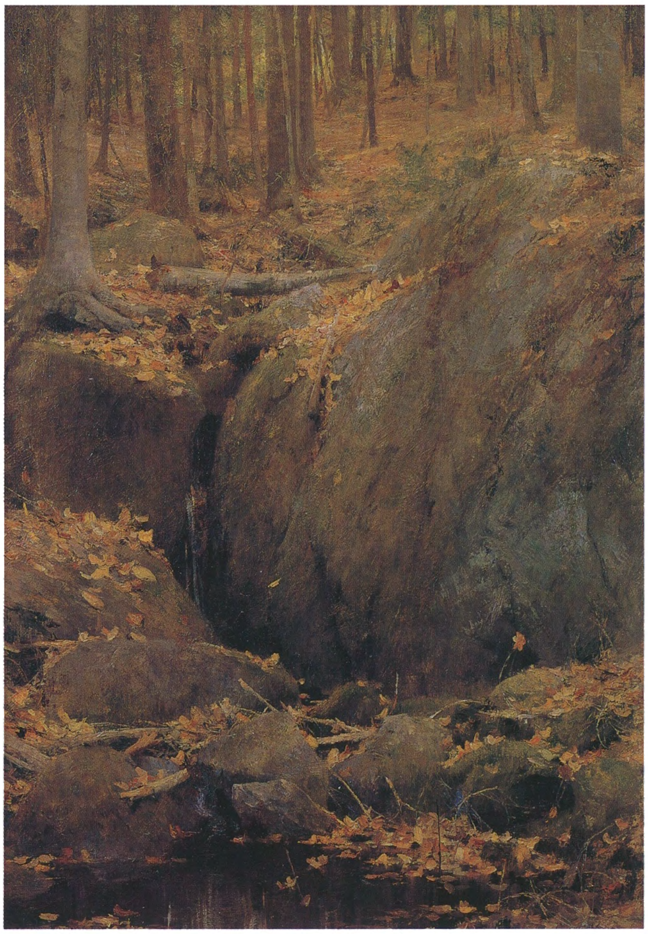


Fig. 3.54. Francis Coates Jones, *Rocky Pool*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 26 x 18 in. Private collection.

This exchange indicates the difficulty that Americans like Simmons and Harrison experienced in attempting to navigate their way toward a personal style—in addition to an American style. In essence, Bastien-Lepage maintained a quasi-academic allegiance to detail, upon which he built his exquisite renderings of Tonalist atmosphere, while most Americans were adopting more painterly methods that eschewed elaborate detail. Many American artists simply painted imitation Bastien-Lepage pastoral scenes. Others, like the Harrison brothers, Davis, and J. Alden Weir, took kernels of what Bastien-Lepage had to offer—his soft, lucent, near-photographic, plein-air realism (and the Frenchman's "square brush" painting technique)—and allowed his stylistic innovations expression through their individual temperaments and American sympathies. Francis Coates Jones, (1857–1932) brother of the landscapist Hugh Bolton Jones, painted mainly figurative genre works upon his return to New York in the early 1880s; his few pure landscapes, like *Rocky Pool*, circa 1900 (fig. 3.54), preserve the still-ravishing beauty of Bastien-Lepage's crystalline atmospherics and scintillating details right up to century's end, when the Tonalist landscape was in its ascendancy. Jones is practically a case study, especially compared to his landscapist brother, of how the French academic figurative tradition, even in the best American hands, was by 1900 a style already twenty years out of date and preserved in amber. *Rocky Pool*, for all its extraordinary subtle beauties, could just as easily have been painted in 1880. Contemporary Tonalist landscapes by 1900 were almost universally conceived in a broadly painted expressive style.

Perhaps the critical point to be made at this juncture is that the best of the expatriate American landscape painters working in Paris and Brittany in the late 1870s right through the 1890s, Alexander and Birge Harrison, J. Alden Weir, Hugh Bolton Jones, Arthur Hoeber, John Twachtman, Dennis Miller Bunker, Charles Platt, Charles Harold Davis, and Robert Henri, had limited interest in the Barbizon School, which was already a historical style; rather, they developed along lines that combined academic painterliness, Bastien-Lepage's tonal atmospherics, and a fascination with the pearly gray hues of the Breton coast, with an admixture of Whistlerian aestheticism and shared American sensibilities for pure landscape that nevertheless invoked the hidden life of nature. It was this hybrid Transcendentalist feel for the land bathed in crystalline tonalities that they brought back to America in the 1880s—not a retardataire Barbizon style, which in turn merged with indigenous currents pursued by Inness and his likeminded confreres. Those few major painters, like Dwight Tryon and Bruce Crane, who were influenced early on by Barbizon models when they studied abroad, upon their return soon jettisoned their loyalty to the men of 1830 in favor of the progressive stylistic advances of Aesthetic Tonalism, which had become de rigeur in New York by the early 1880s. It was Whistler and Inness, with La Farge as a large behind-the-scenes presence in the Society of American Artists, who molded the modernist vision of the day. It is to Whistler—who dominated his era like no other, first in America in the 1880s and then in both America and Europe by 1900—that we now turn.

James McNeill Whistler and His Influence: A Very American Revolution

One of the most innovative and influential American artists of all time, James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), made a vital contribution to American modernism that even today, more than one hundred years after his death, is often overlooked (fig. 3.55). If George Inness is the spiritual godfather of the Tonalist movement, Whistler is its aesthetic leader and master craftsman. If Inness provided the iconic image of the intimate American landscape, Whistler shaped its fromal elements, its non-narrative and abstract values, and decorative ligaments—and gave flight to the ethereal dynamic of the style. Whistler's art, variously described in terms of the Aesthetic movement and "art for art's sake," defined an era on both sides of the Atlantic. Whistler also presents one of the great paradoxes in American art history: an American artist who spent his entire career working abroad and yet had unparalleled influence in his homeland. Only John Singer Sargent even comes close. Whistler's reputation soared at the turn of the century, only to falter in the 1930s and then rise again by the 1980s. In some critical circles, Whistler has been viewed more as a European artist of the Anglo-French school than as an American artist rooted in the sensibilities of his homeland. From the perspective of the Tonalist movement, Whistler's key role in the development of American modernism reveals his deeply American personality and peculiar talent—a capability that expressed itself, indeed found its raison d'etre, in opposition to prevailing Victorian norms of narrative art. In this and his interest in formal values, he joins company with American originals like Inness, La Farge, Currier, and Twachtman. From 1880 on (ten to twenty years before it was the case in either England or France), Whistler began to exert extraordinary influence on American art, culture, and society. Only Inness and later Ryder, Wyant, Homer, and Blakelock, and possibly Sargent in terms of portraiture, approached his reputation and impact. Whistler's influence on American art seems to have occurred in two consecutive waves, the first in the early 1880s when his intimate work in etching and pastel done in Venice exerted a tantalizing spell. An etching like *The Traghetto No. 2*, 1880 (fig. 3.56), with it ambiguous spaces and floating spectral leaf forms in the shadowy passage backing up to the canal beyond, intrigued artists and patrons and developed a taste for small-scale, low-toned landscapes, exquisitely designed with haunting patterns of natural forms. By 1900, when Whistler was better known to expatriate Americans and his reputation loomed large in Europe, his larger portraits and Nocturnes resulted in a darker, more tenebrous expressive style of paint handling, a style subsequently taken up by the Symbolists. This early Aesthetic Tonalism of 1880s America gradually, by 1900, elided into Expressive Tonalism, larger in scale and more dramatic and brooding, both in its emphasis on symbolic form and the gestural brushstroke. By the turn of the century, Whistler's refined art, encompassing painting, etching, pastel, interior design, and the full range of decorative arts—along with his later expressive style—was so much a part of the American cultural mainstream, that the period might well be described

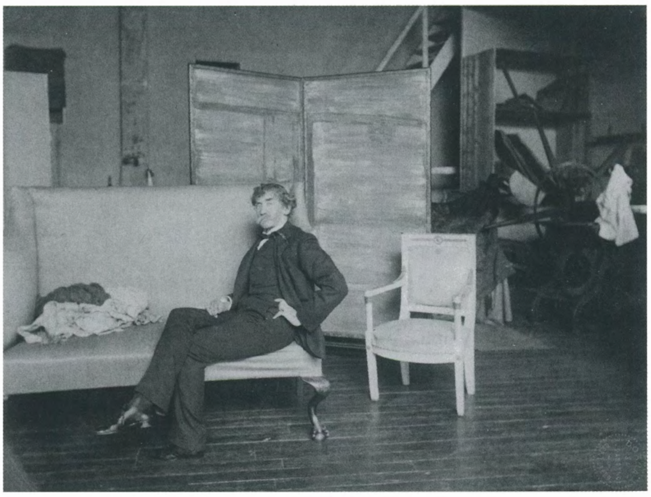


Fig. 3.55. James McNeill Whistler in an undated photograph in front of *Blue and Silver Screen with Old Battersea Bridge* in his Paris studio. Courtesy Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Washington, DC.

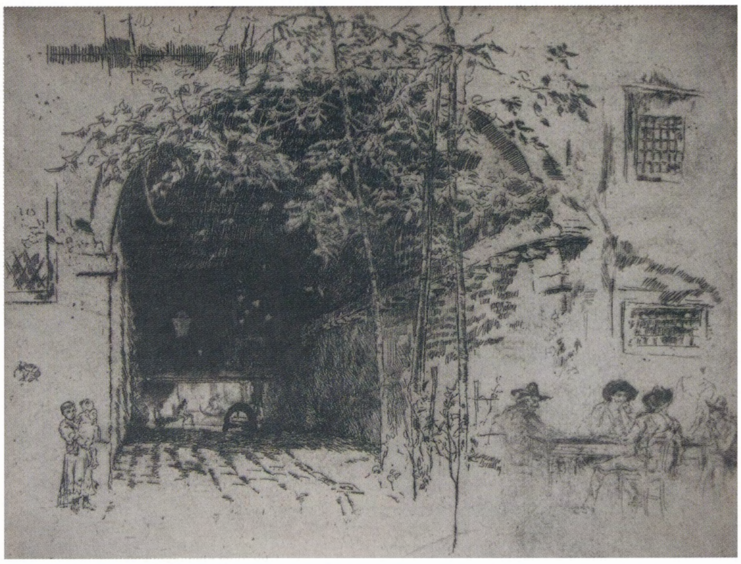


Fig. 3.56. James McNeill Whistler, *The Traghetto No. 2*, 1880. Etching, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

as Whistlerian. For many Americans, he personified the ideal of the artist—certainly the modern artist: an aesthete replete with panache, sensuality, and biting wit; a figure of some sexual ambivalence who was able to throw a punch in a brawl; and an individual of great spiritual depth who promoted art as a kind of civic religion. It is all the more astonishing that Whistler, the expatriate aesthete and master of visual refinement, was so fully embraced by a vigorous young country utterly absorbed in a materialist frenzy of wealth creation and the flexing of newly won economic power.

A Tonalist to his fingertips, Whistler virtually created, synthesized, and then elevated the aesthetic paradigm of the movement to prominence in the fin-de-siècle art world. He certainly drew on modernist thought current in literary and artistic circles, especially the elevated ideas of Rossetti and Swinburne, themselves drawing on the poetry of Baudelaire, which extolled the symbiotic fecundity of music, poetry, and art, or, as it was called, synaesthesia. Whistler's adoption of musical titles for many of his paintings anticipated the ideas of Walter Pater, who advocated a non-narrative art in which form and matter undergo a kind of imaginative fusion in the hand of the artist, and in turn, the act of creation refines the art object to its symbolic essence: an object of creative genius that touches on the universal. Whistler's soft-edged, ambiguous, and mysterious forms suffused in haunting atmosphere gave voice to a visual culture that was as suggestive as it was ethereal. In effect, he devised out of whole cloth—almost single-handedly—an alternate or parallel type of modernist disposition, a countercurrent to 1870s–80s Impressionism. Here was an art that was abstract, expressive of the individual, and thoroughly anti-bourgeois. One might call Whistler a conservative radical: his revolutionary doctrine was based on the painterly values and colorist subtleties of the old masters, especially Velásquez and Vermeer, and possibly those of Gainsborough and the English watercolor tradition. In America, Whistler's conservative revolution—art and uplift for the enlightened few—seemed, at least to modern scholarship, less radical than the Impressionists, when, in fact, it was far more daring in terms of formal values. Whistler had an uncanny appeal to the New England mind: his abstract, dematerialized, and painterly art provided a complement to Emersonian notions of subjective insight and uplift, often packaged with suave Anglophile cachet. In fact, Whistler's dispensation would become *the* primary modernistic dynamic in America between 1880 and 1910, sweeping away all before it. To a lesser degree, this was also true in Europe, where he influenced late Monet and Degas, Bonnard, Vuillard, Picasso, and the Symbolists. Whistler's revolution constitutes the real birth of American modernism, pre-dating the Ashcan School (Robert Henri and his followers were very much formed in the Whistler mold) and the Armory Show of 1913 by nearly thirty years.

Born in 1834, Whistler was of the same generation as John La Farge and Homer Dodge Martin. For the majority of second-generation Tonalists born after 1840, both those who studied abroad and those who remained in America, Whistler, older and with a reputation among advanced painters in Paris, was their hero. Part of the attraction was Whistler's Americanness, the character traits and sympathies he shared with his fellow artists. Like so many of his expatriate countrymen who studied abroad—Currier, Harrison, Bunce, Muhrman, Twachtman, Platt, and Bridgman come immediately to mind—Whistler responded with almost religious fervor to certain places and atmospheric phenomenon that he found enchanting, and begging interpretation in paint. The atmosphere-shrouded landscape, as it had for Inness, Wyant, Martin, La Farge, and Ryder—and the Americans in Brittany—elicited deep emotions in Whistler. Whistler's Nocturnes of the fog-bound Thames are only the most dramatic example of his translation of atmosphere into dematerialized form. Oddly, it took an American eye, a non-Londoner like Whistler, to fully appreciate the subtle interplay of color tones along the misty Thames at eventide and night. None other than Oscar Wilde recognized how much Whistler had literally changed the way Londoners saw their city. "Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the house into monstrous shadows? To whom, if not to them and their master [Whistler], do we owe the lovely silver mists that brood over our river, and turn to faint forms of fading grace curved bridge and swaying barge? The extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to a particular school of Art."[83]

Whistler may have been the first to fully capture such brooding mists, but he was quickly followed by scores of American painters working abroad who became equally enamored of European light and plein-air painting. It would be stretching the point to say that such sensibility was a national characteristic, but the expatriate experience did allow American artists a new take on familiar scenes, scenes that resonated with romantic and mysterious charms for the non-native—as the Thames did for Monet, who painted it in 1870–71, and later in 1889–91. The result was to instill a passion in the Americans for certain effects of color and delicate tonal transitions in their landscapes. The catalogue of paintings by American expatriates that are set along the seashore or nearby rivers or estuaries, reflecting fog and opalescent skies is a long one. We have already seen how Alexander Harrison and his brother Birge were inspired by the light and air of Brittany, as were other like Bridgman, Bunce, Twachtman, Platt, and Simmons—some were independently inspired, while others followed Whistler's lead.

Whistler might be considered a born expatriate. Even as a youngster he moved constantly. He lived much of his life near

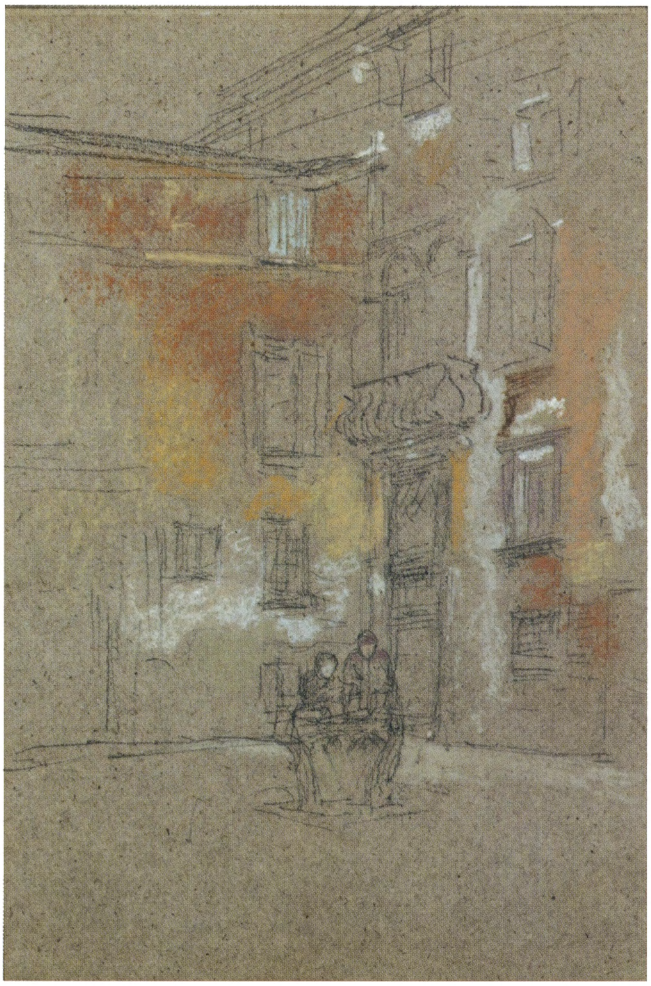


Fig. 3.57. James McNeill Whistler, *Venetian Courtyard: Corte Bollani*, 1880. Chalk and pastel on brown paper, 11⅞ x 8 in. Courtesy Spink Fine Art.

major rivers—he was born in Lowell where the Merrimack and Concord rivers meet; later in Springfield, Massachusetts, he would have known the Connecticut River. In Saint Petersburg, where his father worked as an engineer, the young impressionable boy was surrounded by canals and exotic sites; his years at West Point would have offered panoramic views of the Hudson; in Paris, as an art student, there was the Seine, and in London, where he had briefly stayed as child, the endlessly fascinating panorama of the Thames. During his many years in London, Whistler often moved from studio to studio, but always with the Thames and its inspiration at or near his Chelsea doorstep. As early as 1859, Whistler was painting the Thames, and in 1861 the shore in Brittany (at about the same time La Farge was painting his brilliant tonal landscapes along the coast at Newport). As his career progressed, Whistler seemed increasingly drawn to cloudy or foggy weather, if not along the Thames then by the seaside at Trouville, Valparaiso Bay, or the coast of Brittany, and certainly in Venice, where in a pastel like *Venetian Courtyard: Corte Bollani*, 1880 (fig. 3.57), he fully indulged his penchant for the most minimal and deliquescent effects of fading light. In the same way, Alexander Harrison would later find himself enchanted by refulgent twilight on the sea around Concarneau (Harrison, like Whistler, had served in the U.S. Coastal Survey). Whistler's friends and biographers, E. R. and J. Pennell, noted that the artist eschewed traditional terrestrial landscape as too cluttered but was drawn to the broad sweeping vistas of sea and river. "He took no interest in landscape; 'there were too many trees in the country,' he said. But he loved the sea, from the days of *The Blue Wave* at Biarritz and *The Shores of Brittany* until one of the last summers when he painted at Domburg, in Holland."[84] *The Coast of Brittany* (also known as *Alone with the Tide*), 1861 (fig. 3.58), although an early work in a relatively realistic style, including a narrative element in the sleeping Breton girl, displays the artist's developed feeling for the pure armature of land, sea, and sky. There is little interest in recession into space and the high horizon and piling up of rocky forms results in a flattening effect that conveys both the delightful patterns of the shoreline and the transparency of air that Whistler relished.

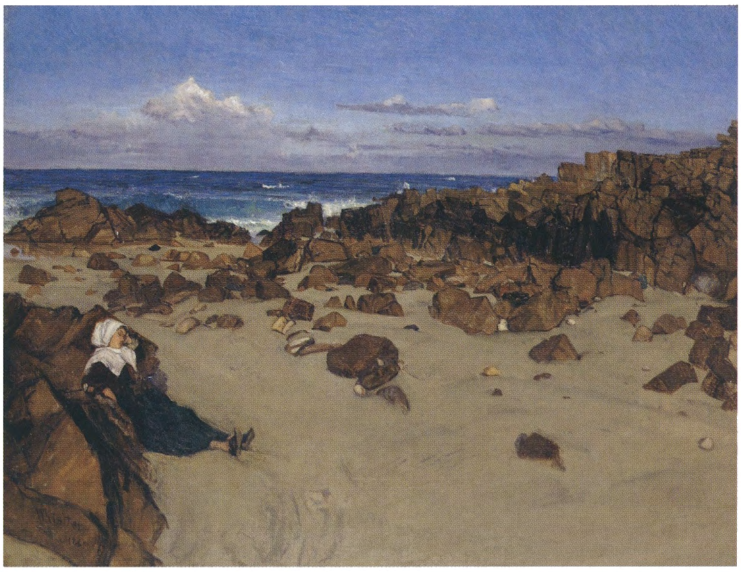


Fig. 3.58. James McNeill Whistler, *The Coast of Brittany* (also known as *Alone with the Tide*), 1861. Oil on canvas, 34⅜ x 45½ in. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. In memory of William Arnold Healy, given by his daughter Susie Healy Camp.

Whistler's Landscapes

Although Whistler made his early reputation with portrait and genre masterpieces, his landscape paintings, pastels, and etchings represent his deepest achievements. Even his early genre paintings like *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1862, National Gallery of Art) and *At the Piano* (1858–59, The Taft Museum, Cincinnati) show Whistler in full retreat from the hardscrabble realism of Courbet as he played down narrative, or even psychological associations, and focused on formal values, flat modeling, and harmonies of tone: the delicate arrangement and decorative deployment of two-dimensional tonal form that constituted the central focus of

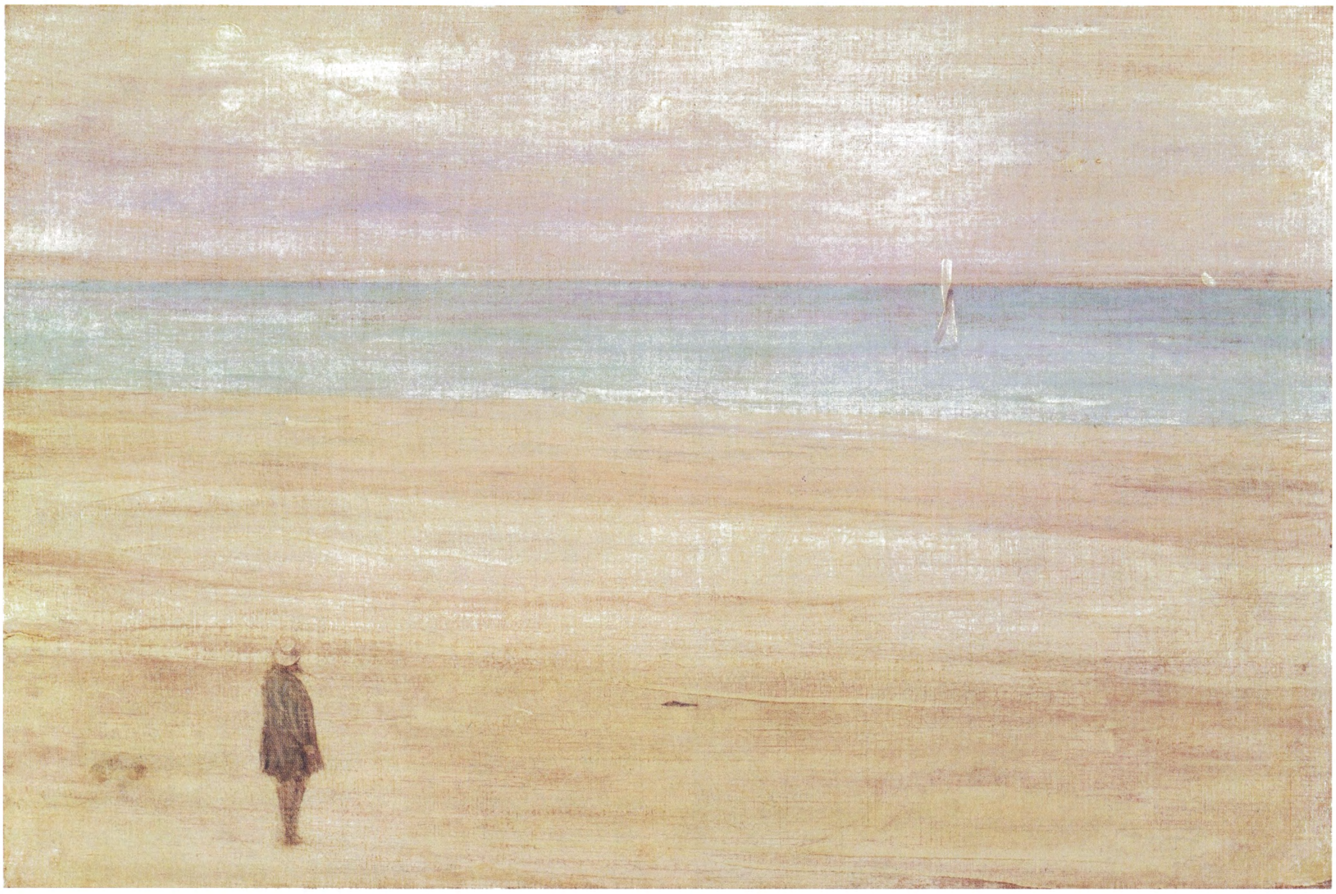


Fig. 3.59. James McNeill Whistler, *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 19½ x 29¾ in. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.

his art. Though he pursued figurative work until the end of his life, his true passion, as his career progressed, seemed kindled by plein-air landscape (mostly completed in the studio from memory), the subject most conducive to the underlying abstract and spiritualizing impulse at the emotional center of his art. He found that the microclimates of the Thames, Venice, and the French coast, from which he literally seemed to draw energy, produced the suggestive evanescent effects he favored. Portraits were a necessary source of income and prestige, fitting into the established exhibition categories at the academies and salons, and thus guaranteeing the artist publicity (sometimes notoriety) and hoped-for praise and recognition—as well as badly needed sales. Whistler was technically challenged by portraiture, especially getting the hands right, and was a driven—and for his sitters an often exasperating—perfectionist. But even his portraits were less about getting a likeness, or even a depth of characterization in his sitters, although he often managed both very well, and more about a struggle for a harmonious arrangement of tones. He repainted endlessly and discarded thousands of failures. The Pennells in their biography noted that when Whistler spoke of color he meant "'the arrangement of colour.'" When Whistler repainted a portrait, he did not simply repaint a section, but had to repaint the entire picture to preserve the overall harmony of tone. An anecdote reported by the Pennells demonstrates the exquisite balance of tonal relations for which he strove. "The rose of the domino, the fan, and the flesh is so managed that the cold grey of the background seems to be flushed with rose. Duret [an arts writer and friend of Whistler], when he showed the picture, took a sheet of paper, cut a hole in it, and placed it against the background, to prove that the grey, when surrounded by white, is pure and cold without a touch of rose, and that Whistler got his effect by his knowledge of the relation of colour and his mastery of tone."[85] Whistler's near obsession with tonal relations and modulations, at the heart of his painterly and colorist aspirations, found their most natural expression in landscape, especially the pastels and the Nocturnes. As the Pennells pointed out, Whistler even draped his studio windows with diaphanous hangings to obtain the same kind of subdued light for his portraits as he preferred in his landscapes.

As early as 1865, in his serene and schematic beach scene, *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*, 1865, (fig. 3.59), Whistler had established his primary visual trope and mastered the technical fundamentals found in the Nocturnes of the 1870s. Thin transparent washes of pigment are dragged across the canvas—brush, palette knife, and fingers are all employed—to form bands of beach, sea, and sky with threads of tonal variations delicately interwoven to provide variation and the illusion of depth, a near perfect exposition of what Birge Harrison would later describe as vibration and refraction, using both the ground of the canvas and adjacent tones to full visual effect. It is also, in its simplest idiom, an example of the painterly values that Whistler learned in Paris from his teacher Charles Gleyre, and esteemed in the work of Velásquez, Delacroix, and Hals: a surface display of tone, texture, brushstroke, and formal compositional structure that perfectly elucidates the underlying idea at hand. Thus, *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville,* offers another Whistlerian paradox—and perhaps a very American one: Whistler's modernist vision is firmly based on the technical values of the old masters. As the critic Richard Dorment has suggested, Whistler may well have borrowed techniques from Gainsborough and the English watercolor tradition in his most radical works. Again, Whistler's stance as an outsider allowed him to better appreciate the achievements of Velásquez and Hals, and then appropriate elements of the old-master tradition in new ways. In this, as in many things, Whistler was the avatar for his fellow Americans like Chase, Currier, Duveneck, and Twachtman, who translated traditional techniques to radical ends and very individual departures.

Whistler's Artistic Reinvention and Modernist Values

Between 1862 and 1871, the year of the first fully realized Nocturnes, Whistler was engaged in the quest to reinvent himself and his art, both to free himself from the realist tradition of Courbet, first embraced as a student in Paris, and to confront the hidebound English art establishment with its reliance on elaborate Ruskinian detail, high moralism, and saccharine literary and genre association. In this double refutation of prevailing norms—of both mean and ends—especially of the standards espoused by the Royal Academy, Whistler was confronting the establishment much as Inness, La Farge, and Hunt, with their more painterly and colorist values, were challenging the New York establishment of landscape painters—those niggling purveyors of effusive Pre-Raphaelite detail—in the National Academy in the 1860s and 1870s. These battles in New York and London were not unlike those of Manet and Monet in the 1870s against the prevailing academic norms enshrined in the official Paris Salons. But in London, Whistler was nearly alone in his one-man struggle. His combative modus operandi of vigorous self-promotion was unprecedented at the time in the thoroughness that he brought to preparing the battlefield; such generalship made him a pariah to the art-world establishments on both sides of the English Channel—and a hero in his homeland.

The astute writer on art, John Van Dyke, in his *American Painting and Its Tradition,* of 1919, aptly described Whistler's revolt (conceptually influenced by Japanese prints at about the same time La Farge was also adopting formal strategies from Asian art) as one moving from representation to the decorative, a project that eschewed traditional ideas of depicting the third dimension by modeling and the use of light and color—"a depth by protrusion rather than by recession," according to Van Dyke. "When, therefore, Whistler came to the fore and insisted that the third dimension was something of a vulgarity and that figures should not be round and stand out but be flat and *stand in,* there was instant disagreement."[86] Whistler's championing of the aerial perspective derived from Japanese woodblocks, wrote Van Dyke, was crucial in his shift to a fundamentally decorative strategy. "There should not be too much depth. The pattern should be kept flat and the picture should not 'break through the wall' but be a part of it. Moreover, contrast of color was less decorative, less charming, than accord. A picture should be pitched in a certain tonal key and maintain the tone throughout. The minor chords were more refined than those of higher pitch and greater resonance; a twilight or a midnight was more lovely than 'a foolish sunset' [a reference to the English enthusiasm for Turner]. Finally the picture was finished when its decorative pattern was complete. The whole meaning of the picture was in its look. It should make no other appeal. Piety, patriotism, sentiment, motion, story were all barred out as beside the mark—foreign to the medium."[87]

These Whistlerian values—modernist values identified by Van Dyke (a friend and admirer of Whistler) as originating in the 1860s—elucidate Tonalism's decorative birthright, which in turn became a defining aesthetic mode in international art by 1900, on both sides of the Atlantic. What is harder to explain is why parochial, backwater America embraced Whistlerian aestheticism so much sooner and more completely than Europe. A number of factors came into play. Whistler, with all his dandified eccentricities, was championed by his countrymen as one of America's first world-class celebrities—a hometown boy made good on the world stage. The American art establishment, especially as represented by the Society of American Artists and its sympathetic supporters like Charles de Kay (who wrote a nove, *The Bohemian, A Tragedy of Modern Life,* 1878, with a character based on Whistler), was on the lookout for what could be claimed as an original national style: a distinctive and original American contribution to international art. By the early 1880s, Inness, Currier, Ryder, and Blakelock had already been anointed as bearers of the national flame, and Whistler was soon to become first among equals. Also, Americans liked their innovations to come out of a deep and established tradition and his countrymen recognized Whistler as a devoted disciple of the old masters and a master craftsman in his own right. The abstract essence of Whistler's art, especially manifest in landscape—much less the deep seriousness of his enterprise, spiritual, mysterious, and sensuous—appealed on the most profound level to the American psyche, to a culture that had long embraced landscape as its national art. As will be examined in more detail in chapter 7, the trauma of the Civil War—the likes of which would not be experienced by the British until World War I—prepared the American cultural scene for the modernist ambiguities of Whistler's art. Similarly, the purity and ethereality of Whistler's visions appealed to America's cultural elite; many were in search of alternative spiritual focus in their lives, a longing—and a market—to which the Aesthetic movement and its purveyors of art for art's sake catered. Younger American artists were simply spellbound by Whistler's talent. Whistler's progressive spirit, dynamic ideas, boosterism, and anti-authoritarian flair—his delight in twisting the lion's tail of the British establishment—also appealed to his fellow Americans; they were the very characteristics that irritated and dismayed so many of his more sophisticated British and French contemporaries. The artist Joseph Pennell relates a telling moment in his biography of Whistler, when he first met the master in his Chelsea studio, and was asked for his reaction to the famous painting *The Falling Rocket*, casus belli in Whistler's libel suit against Ruskin. Whistler inquired:

> "Well now, what do you think of that? What is it?"
>
> "I said fireworks, and I supposed one of the Cremorne pictures."
>
> "Oh, you do, do you? Isn't it amazing? Bring tots, idiots, imbeciles, blind men, children, anything but the Islander, and they know...."[88]

Whistler's implication in this exchange with Pennell is that it takes an American, with the innocent eye of a child or a fool to comprehend what a sophisticated Englishman (Islander) cannot. In retrospect, it is clear that Whistler used his expatriate status, often wearing his American attitude on his sleeve like a badge of honor, as a bully tactic to propagate his very American revolution under the noses of lapidary Victorian London. There was much of Theodore Roosevelt's bluster in Whistler.

Unlike American artists such as Currier, Alexander Harrison, Twachtman, and Bunce, a generation younger than Whistler, who evolved their innovative styles from within the prevailing modes of the Munich School and the French academic tradition, and kept a relatively low profile, Whistler, once he had embarked on his anti-realist crusade and experienced the sting of rejection, consciously and conscientiously played the card of the outsider and confronted and even baited his critics to promote his vision of art. He was an all-purpose art agitator. His famous butterfly monogram today conjures the promotional methods and branding strategies favored by the fashion industry. He was forever confronting his enemies and ultimately broke them with their own words—turning his critics' ridicule into fodder for his "Ten O'Clock Lectures" and catalogues—thus ridiculing their barbed accusations. Perhaps in Paris, his revolutionary flair, contra-snobbism, and brittle egotism would have played to a more receptive audience, although the French art establishment, an arm of the government and steeped in class politics, was even more hidebound than the English. If Whistler had lived in New York, it might have all been too easy for him, or worse, his feisty eccentricity might have been ignored and his gifts dismissed or overlooked. But London not only offered Whistler his subject matter, it also gave him his edge—the gall and the drive he needed to be fully engaged and to produce his ethereal art. The battle wore him out, and in his last years he bemoaned the long struggle and its toll in terms of the work never completed. By the time of Whistler's death, collectors were not only clamoring for his pictures, past detractors were covering their tracks and hagiographers were busily gathering the near-mythic anecdotes of his genius. In time, the English were claiming Whistler as their own and the French were claiming him for his contribution to the modernist revolution of the Impressionists and post-Impressionists, as evidenced by the fact that he had been invited by Degas to join the Impressionist exhibitions on a number of occasions. But Whistler's revolution was, in fact, a very American thing. Toward the end of his life, Whistler understood that his real legacy—and his true admirers—were in America, and he directed his work to his homeland and eagerly engaged American collectors like Charles Freer. But even in his day and in the decade after his death, questions about how to classify Whistler's art, his legacy, and his nationality, lingered.

Whistler: The American Outsider

The battle for Whistler's American soul began around the time of his death, when his reputation was at its height; the scintillating complexities of his character were constantly dissected in terms of his nationality and peculiar gifts. American critics and collectors were quick to claim him as one of their own. But how to explain an American expatriate artist (often identified with the foppish, effeminate aesthete Oscar Wilde) in an age when Americans were considered paragons of material and masculine practicality. Oddly, even Whistler's fastidious mannerisms and elegant panache, to say nothing of his spiritualizing art, was ultimately aligned with traditional American values. Charles de Kay, the *New York Times* critic who had early on championed the eccentric work of Albert Pinkham Ryder and Ralph Albert Blakelock, easily embraced Whistler's appearance on the American stage in the late 1870s as a pronounced American type. By 1904, when reviewing Whistler's memorial exhibition in Boston, he singled out the Nocturnes and landscapes as Whistler's main contribution to art. "Whistler was a crepuscular painter who reminds us of persons with abnormal sight who can see better in the dusk than ordinary men. No Englishman has ever painted English atmosphere so well. No Frenchman has approached him in the skill to paint nocturnes. In these he is a pure poet of nature."[89] Turn-of-the-century American critics like Sadakichi Hartmann had no problem explaining Whistler as a manifestation of a very American cultural type. "His wit and sarcasm was American. It was not pointless, neither brusque nor frivolous but it was at times flat like Mark Twain's. His self-exploitation revealed the shrewdness of an intellectual Barnum … His women … have a natural finesse, direct grace and elegant frailty that can be found nowhere but in America. His power of adaptability, his disregard for ancient culture for modern purposes, his technical fanaticism, his adventurous tastes and theories, all have an American physiognomy. If there is anything that will make him an American it is the aptitude for labor, free association, and practical adaptation."[90] His contemporary biographers, the Pennells, found Whistler to be a genuine and very sympathetic American, in fact, reveling in his Americanness—if with something of a Southern flair from his mother's North Carolina roots (his younger brother was a doctor in the Confederate army). Whistler's obsessive need to talk, to be at the center of conversation, constantly stirring up controversy, often for its own sake or to further his agenda, was, in his day, dismissed or revered as a peculiarly American trait. His often Spartan living conditions and practical bent and experimental use of materials were considered typically American. His famous Sunday morning breakfasts in which he served buckwheat pancakes to his guests were only one of many American customs in which he indulged and defined his allegiance. Like a chameleon, he could use a British accent or the American vernacular to suit his purposes both in conversation and in his writings. His words, written or spoken, were as carefully conceived as his art.

Modern critics, like Robert Rosenblum, have noted Whistler's "Anglo-American tradition of puritanical aestheticism," and his profound influence on fellow American moderns Milton Avery and Mark Rothko.[91] Other writers, like the Chicago collector A. J. Eddy, found deep-rooted American traits in Whistler, especially that of the proselytizer. "The Puritan element which is to be found in every American achievement, whether in war, in art, or in literature, though often deeply hidden, is conspicuous in Whistler's work, though he himself would probably have been the first to deny it; and it is this element of sobriety, of steadfastness, of undeviating adherence to convictions and ideals, that constitutes the firm foundation of his art, of his many brilliant and beautiful superstructures of fancy."[92] In Whistler's infatuation with Japanese art, the cult of Nirvana, and the ethereal abstraction that flowed from it, there is much of what animated his countrymen John La Farge, Henry Adams, and Ernest Fenollosa, the great scholar of Japanese art, who preached on Asian culture to Boston's Brahmin elites. Boston's artistic and cultural lights, long adherents of Tonalism's aesthetic and spiritual values, first inculcated by Hunt in the cult of Corot, found an easy receptivity to everything the cosmopolitan Whistler represented. Whistler's love for things Japanese, for a simpler, more harmonious art and philosophy, was shared by Boston and New York cultural trendsetters, especially in the circles of La Farge, Chase, and the Society of American Artists. An etching like *Upright Venice*, 1879–80 (fig. 3.60), with it high vantage point, cropping, simplicity, and elegance of design, appealed to the growing market for Asian art. Also, Whistler's mysterious evocations of night seem apiece with much of what captivated Henry James and Edgar Allan Poe. The role of preacher he mischievously adopted in his famous "Ten O'Clock" lecture has something of the ring of the evangelist for a newfound faith and a saving creed. Whistler wanted purity, harmony, and unity—the essence of form, as he described it to fellow artist Otto Bacher, like breath on a windowpane. His art-for-art's-sake creed filled a gap for spiritual sustenance in a materialistic age, especially in America, which was undergoing a social and industrial transformation unlike anything found in London or Paris. Whistler, like so many Americans of his generation, lived in the shadow of the Civil War; the melancholy aftermath

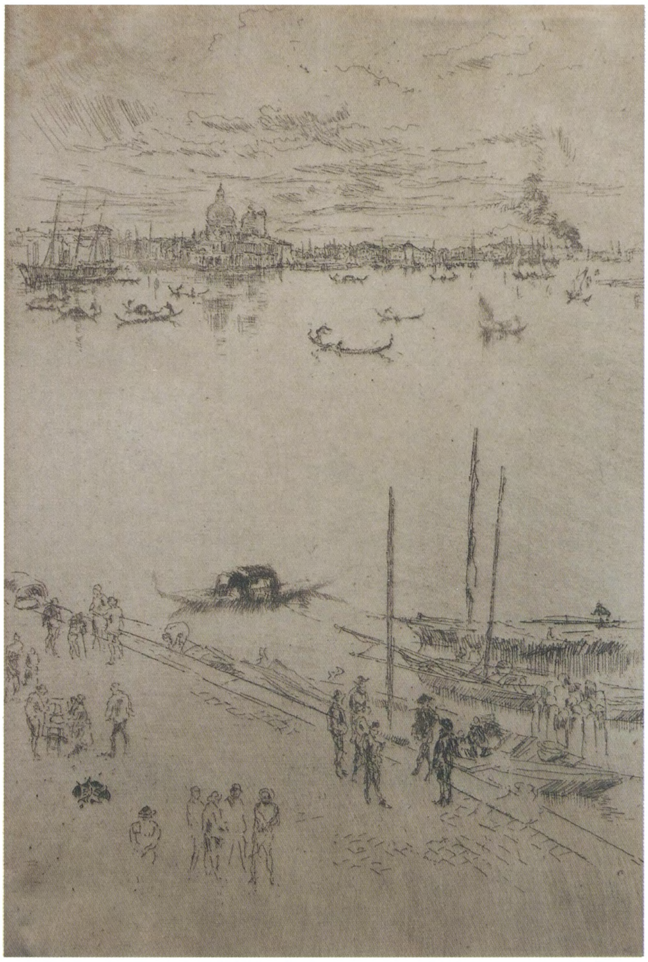


Fig. 3.60. James McNeill Whistler, *Upright Venice*, 1879–80. Etching, 8 x 6 in. Private collection.

of the conflict left many reeling and in search of comfort in nontraditional pursuits. The religious certainties of a younger America had come into question after Darwin, and worship at the high altar of art was increasingly regarded as an acceptable spiritual alternative. American critics recognized the practical genius of Whistler, an artist who adapted quickly, manipulated his materials in radical ways, and was ever ready to experiment to achieve his elusive goals. And the American public identified with his competitive streak, which drove him to outdo his rivals. He held his countrymen—and women—spellbound.

Whistler's impact on American culture was so all-pervasive that his simultaneously conservative and radical spiritualizing tonal landscapes virtually inoculated American art against widespread acceptance of broken facture, high-keyed Impressionism in the 1880s, right through the first decade of the twentieth century. Like many progressive American artists, Whistler did not follow Monet, Manet, and Renoir down the path of analytical plein-air Impressionism of the 1870s—not because he was not capable of painting in such a manner, but because the style, depicting bright sunlight and cosmopolitan subject matter, was entirely uncongenial to him (he was much closer in spirit and outlook to the late Degas and Monet, who were in turn both influenced by Whistler). Again, Whistler's disinterest in Impressionist facture and subject matter was another trait he shared with many of the finest Tonalists, the successor generation born between 1840 and 1865, who disregarded the Impressionist mode of Monet and Renoir of the 1870s—again, not because it was too daring or modern, but because it represented a materialistic, even a quasi-scientific mode of seeing that they felt obscured or degraded more spiritual and even religious ends. If Whistler, like many of his fellow artists, was not religious in a formal sense, he was, nevertheless, a man of great spiritual depths and reacted profoundly to inspiration when and where he found it, mostly in the natural world. Whistler—like his friend, Homer Dodge Martin—always required inspiration; in fact, he could not work without it. Reflecting the sometimes lonely life of an expatriate, there was a streak of melancholy in Whistler, of the searcher ever in pursuit of a home shore. Much of his instinct as an ideologue, which compelled Whistler to propagate his newfound insights and seek converts, seems to have been heightened by his intense emotional commitment to his way of seeing, although his fierce pride and ambition would have driven him forward under almost any circumstances.

Whistler's Conservative Revolution

Because Whistler's revolution, along with that of Inness, Ryder, and a host of other Tonalists, was based on older academic values—the dark tenebrous style of the old masters—twentieth-century critics have often misunderstood its radical departures. While broken-facture, high-keyed Impressionism is a mere jot in time in terms of modernist art, tonal abstraction became the leitmotif for the Symbolists, late Monet and Degas, and the Steiglitz circle, and continued right up through Mark Rothko, the Color Field painters, and beyond. Much of the endurance of this radical stream of modernism is due to its essentially conservative nature: it retained the quality of craftsmanship, superb handling, painterly skills, and decorative design that remain the hallmarks of the classical tradition—and a fundamental birthright of modernism. The lasting power of Whistlerian Tonalism is partly a product of its conservative roots, which drew on the technical resources of Velásquez in particular, and the old masters from Hals and Vermeer to the Venetians Tintoretto and Giorgione. This respect for tradition—and the expertise it generated—was shared by almost all Whistler's progressive American colleagues. By the first decade of the new century, Whistler's conservative revolution had so won the day that it was almost unremarkable, something akin to the way in which, in our own era, post-modernist styles in architecture would become ubiquitous on the American scene by 2000. In 1907, just a few years after Whistler's death, the art historian Charles Caffin described the sweeping effect of Whistler's conservative revolution:

"First, it affected the painter's way of seeing things. It substituted for a realism of observation such as is recorded by the camera, a painter's way of seeing; for a detailed analysis, a pictorial synthesis or summary. It was realized that Velasquez painted what he could see, not what he knew was present to his eyes ... Following his example, the moderns began to paint 'impressions,' to be, as the phrase was coined, 'impressionists.' ... Secondly, it affected a change in the way painters regarded color and their manner of laying on the paint. Velásquez's subdued harmonies of blacks and grays, sparingly relieved with yellows, blues, and old rose, opened their eyes to the fascination of subtleties, as compared with the brilliance of strongly contrasted tints. The long, sweeping contours of his figures promoted a taste for the dignity of simple lines and massy compositions. His manner of relieving the monotony of the large colored masses—black, gray, or otherwise—by breaking them into several tones, and giving them a character of distinction through the broad and virile handling of a brush, loaded with paint, taught the value at once of subtlety and of effective craftsmanship. It made it clear that the brush and not the crayon was the tool to be relied upon, and gave an impetus to the art of painting, as distinguished from the art of drawing a figure and subsequently tinting it. Thirdly, the extraordinarily natural appearance of Velásquez's figures and scenes, summed up by Gautier when in front of the *Maids of Honour* he exclaimed, 'Where is the picture?' set the painter to discovering its secret. It was found to be due to the fact that Velásquez placed his figures, as they appeared in nature, with a surrounding envelope of lighted atmosphere; and that his method of doing so had been the accurate rendering of the exact amount of light given off from every visible part of the figure or object represented."[93]

What Velásquez had achieved in figure painting, Whistler adopted and modified for his own purposes in his portraits and landscapes. As Caffin pointed out, by the time of Whistler's death: "[T]he principles that he adopted were diversely used by others; his tenets too simple and universal to found or need a school for their propagation. He did better than attract a few followers and imitators; he influenced the whole world of art. Consciously or unconsciously, his presence is felt in countless studios; his genius permeates modern artistic thought."[94] The ubiquity of Whistler's influence, so embedded in the visual culture by 1907, had by the 1930s completely disappeared from the map of modernist enterprise as described by Alfred Barr—as if the memory of an entire generation had been wiped clean. Barr's 1936 cover for his catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art*, consisted of a chronological flow chart that dispensed with the influence of Whistler, much less the naturalistic Tonalism of Monet, as influences in the development of modern art. It would take another fifty years for Whistler's revolution and his instrumental role in the Tonalist movement—what had been patently clear in 1907—to be fully recognized again, to say nothing of the very real struggle Whistler had endured, no less arduous or important than what Manet, Monet, Degas, and the other Impressionists had experienced in roughly the same years.

Whistler's Breakthrough

Whistler's profound and sweeping contribution to the development of the Tonalist movement in America from 1880 onward did not come without great personal cost. The road to the artist's breakthrough Nocturnes, and the exquisite, simplified, dematerialized pastels of Venice, required years of experimentation, struggle, and self-doubt. To his friend the painter Henri Fantin-Latour he wrote in the early 1860s: "I am horribly depressed at the moment. It's always the same—work that's too hard and uncertain. I am so slow. When will I achieve a more rapid way of painting—when I say that, I mean to say something different; you will understand what I'm driving at. I produce so little, because I rub out so much. Oh! Fantin, I know so little. Things don't go so quickly."[95] Discouraged by what he felt were his technical shortcomings, Whistler sought a better way of handling paint. His love of Japanese art, especially Hiroshige's woodblock prints, suggested a simpler, breezier handling of pigment, laid in quickly and thinly, with the object of achieving an overall tonal harmony, rhythmic unity, and synthesis of means and ends, thus disguising the working process—a work of art that was an end in itself. Whistler always resisted the notion that he derived his style from Oriental sources, insisting that he only selected essential elements such as simplicity of design, rhythmic movement of form, vantage points high and low—the decorative essence—and, above all, elegance in the expressive use of tone. The critic and art historian Richard Dorment has pointed out that Whistler's change in painting style in the mid-1860s to a looser more transparent application of pigment had much to do with his borrowing of British methods, inspired by thin washes of color found in the English school of watercolor, and exploited by portrait artists like Thomas Gainsborough, who built up his images with transparent glazes of oil paint thinned with turpentine.[96] This method of glazed transparent washes of color applied over the prepared ground of the canvas became Whistler's preferred method, and immensely influential for younger artists. This was precisely the Whistlerian mode, the use of a "warm undertone" to set off the cool overtones as described by Birge Harrison in his influential book on landscape painting; what Harrison called "vibration," as the analogous tones, layered one upon another, visually compete in the eye of the viewer. Harrison considered the technical effects of "vibration" and its attendant "refraction"—the effect of adjacent tones—as constituting the primary advance in painting of his generation, although Whistler had learned this from Velásquez and other old masters, especially the Venetians, but exploited its expressive potential like no other. The undertone also provided the added benefit of a harmonizing ground when left exposed in places or allowed to bleed though, thus providing a rich unity of effect. The Pennells described exactly how Whistler used his prepared grounds. "Large quantities of different tones of the prevailing colour in the picture to be painted were mixed, and so much of the medium was used that he called it 'sauce.' Greaves [a friend and assistant to Whistler] says that the Nocturnes were mostly painted on a very absorbent canvas, sometimes on panel, sometimes on bare brown Holland, sized. For the blue Nocturnes, the canvas was covered with a red ground, or the panel was of mahogany, which the pupils got from their boat-building yard, the red forcing up the blues laid on it. Others were done on a warm black, and for the fireworks there was a lead ground. Or, if the night was grey, then, Whistler said, 'the sky is grey, and the water is grey, and, therefore, the canvas must be grey.' Only once within Greaves' memory was the ground white. The ground for his Nocturnes, like the paper for his pastels, was chosen of the prevailing tone of the picture he wanted to paint or of a colour which would give him that tone, not to save work, but to avoid fatiguing the canvas."[97]

Whistler, as has been seen, was influenced by aesthetic theories current at the time, especially the Baudelairian concept of "correspondence" between painting and music, provoking many of Whistler's titles: harmony, symphony, arrangement, and Nocturne. (It was a supporter, Frederick Leyland, who gave Whistler the idea of using "Nocturne" as the title for one of his first Nocturnes.) Whistler asserted, "As music is the poetry of sound, so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject-matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or of colour."[98] Notwithstanding Whistler's denial, the musical analogy was appropriate because the tone scale—sometimes called tone value or tint scale—between black and white has an analogous function to the musical scale, especially in the subtle interplay between related tones. But Whistler was first and foremost a painter not a theorist, an experimenter and obsessive perfectionist, and by fully exploiting the resources of tonal painting, concentrating as never before on surface and rhythm and the interplay of tones, he made a radical contribution to art: less inspired by ideas about art, he was more focused on the nitty-gritty challenge of creation. Whistler was a consummate craftsman, insisting on beautiful surface quality that hid or obscured the painstaking work of creation. By the turn of the century and into the 1920s, Whistler's achievement as a Tonalist was clearly recognized, even by the British art establishment, which had once disparaged him. The art historian Harold Speed has commented, "In modern times Whistler is the painter who stands out pre-eminent as a master of tone values. The nineteenth century saw a great renaissance of this quality in painting, but Whistler is the painter who carried its expressive capabilities to a grater length than any other. He painted subjects where form and colour were so muted, that former painters had found nothing to catch hold of. Such subjects as twilight and night scenes had never been really exploited until Whistler took them up. With his exquisite and subtle perception of delicate tone relations, he found new beauties that before had not been perceived; beauties that were dependent on tone values."[99]

Whistler's exploitation of the gamut of middle tones was unsurpassed in his day. In his artistic manifesto, Whistler made it clear that a work of art succeeded or failed on its internal aesthetic merits, uncontaminated by and unrelated to outside issues. "Art should be independent of all clap-trap—should stand alone, and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it, as devotion, pity, love, patriotism."[100] This formalist doctrine was the essence of the art-for-art's-sake movement as it took hold in America of the 1880s and 1890s, propounded by Oscar Wilde, erstwhile friend and supporter of Whistler. To some degree, almost every important Tonalist artist in America in the 1880s was influenced by Whistler—in spirit or technique or both: Chase, Hugh Bolton Jones, Ryder, Martin, J. Alden Weir, and Inness, to name only a few. Whistler's style became synonymous with sophistication and a kind of rapturous Transcendentalism and spiritual idealism, especially in Boston and Cambridge where the ideas of Hegel and Eastern mysticism had a large following. Whistler's art of disembodied and transient form—the fugitive mystery of form, concealed in atmosphere, or just barely revealed—invoked a kind of quasi-religious intensity, if not awe, not unlike what Henry Ward Beecher had found in Inness of the 1860s and 1870s, although Inness's Swedenborgian gloss on landscape would probably have struck Whistler as poppycock. Whistler's dematerialized art, esoteric as it might have be, remains firmly in the sensuous realm of the here and now—though intimating deeper truths—and so appealed to those enlightened acolytes who could fully grasp its intrinsic beauty.

Whistler's Nocturnes

The path of Whistler's ambition and the ideals of perfection that dogged the artist's every endeavor moved him to greater and greater simplification. His early realist paintings of the Thames and the influence of Japanese art had marked the start of a gradual thinning of his impasto, culminating in the seascapes of 1865 in Trouville, which were executed relatively quickly with a freer handling of paint. *Harmony in Blue and Silver: Trouville*, 1865 (see fig. 3.59) retains just enough realistic anchors—the ghostly figure of Courbet, the sailboats that describe a diagonal recession into space—to maintain the guise

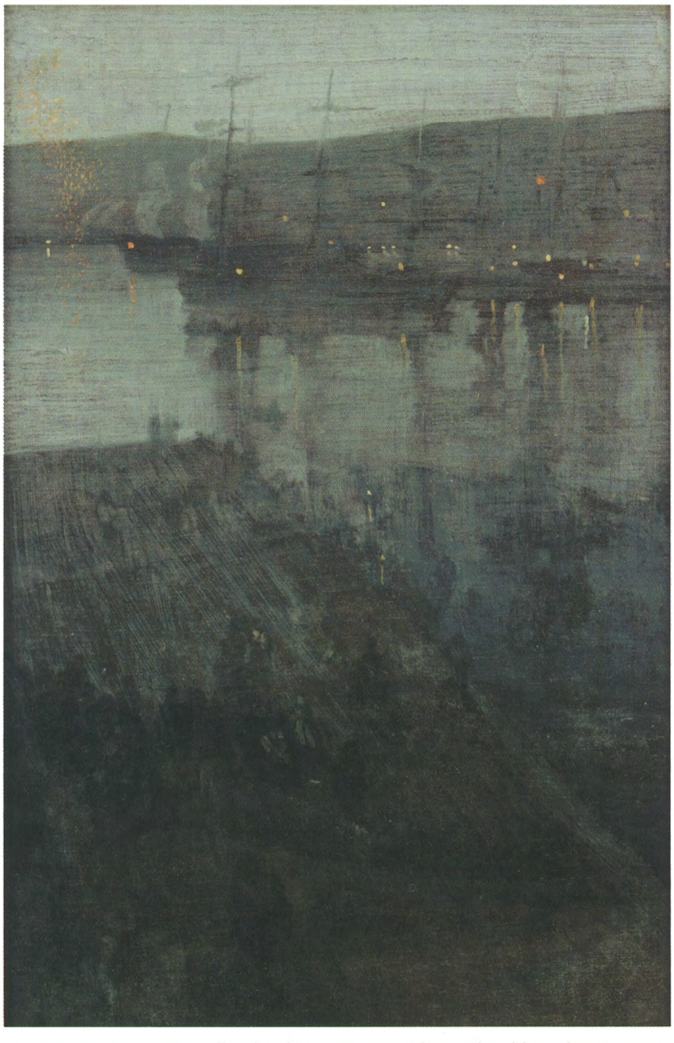


Fig. 3.61. James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Valparaiso*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 29.6 x 19.8 in. Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

of a traditional landscape, though far from Boudin's fashionable scenes of strollers on the beach. A year later on his quixotic nine-month trip to Valparaiso, Whistler pushed the boundaries of traditional realism further still. His 1866 painting *Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Valparaiso*, 1866 (fig. 3.61), approaches the complete dematerialization of sea and sky, ships and foreground docks, that would culminate in the artist's Nocturnes of the early 1870s. Whistler's gestural, oscillating lines of horizontal pigment in the sky convey as much a decorative effect, and calligraphic flair, as a realistic rendering. His enchantment with haunting amorphous shapes and sensuous surface texture, here threatening three-dimensional integrity, becomes an abiding passion in his work, as pictorial truth trumps that of realism.

The Nocturnes of the early 1870s form the epicenter of Whistler's art. They are at once the climax of his experimentation and struggles throughout the 1860s and the imaginative, emotional, and technical wellspring for all of his work to follow. Those Nocturnes set along the artist's beloved Thames, often scenes glimpsed from the artist's Chelsea window or viewed from a boat on the river in fog and mist, are evidence of the artist's enduring infatuation with the mysteries of fugitive light and form. It was the suggestive quality of light and ambiguous form that kindled his creative fires—the light that allowed the industrial wasteland and smokestacks of Battersea to be transformed into a fairyland of enchanted towers. This point of departure, the conveyance of a poetic impression derived from quotidian experience, was a motive Whistler shared with many American Tonalists, such as John Twachtman, Henry Muhrman, Charles Warren Eaton, Dwight Tryon, Birge Harrison and Leon Dabo, who were adept at finding the inherent poetry in urban scenes. With Whistler's examples before them, they eschewed the mundane or even picturesque reality for the spirit of place as revealed in certain light—dusk, night, and dawn, or low-toned atmospheric approximations. This was a fundamentally reductive strategy of focusing on salient effects, a subjective response that allowed the artist the full gamut of individual expression. "Subject," for Whistler, according to the Pennells, "sentiment, meaning were for him in

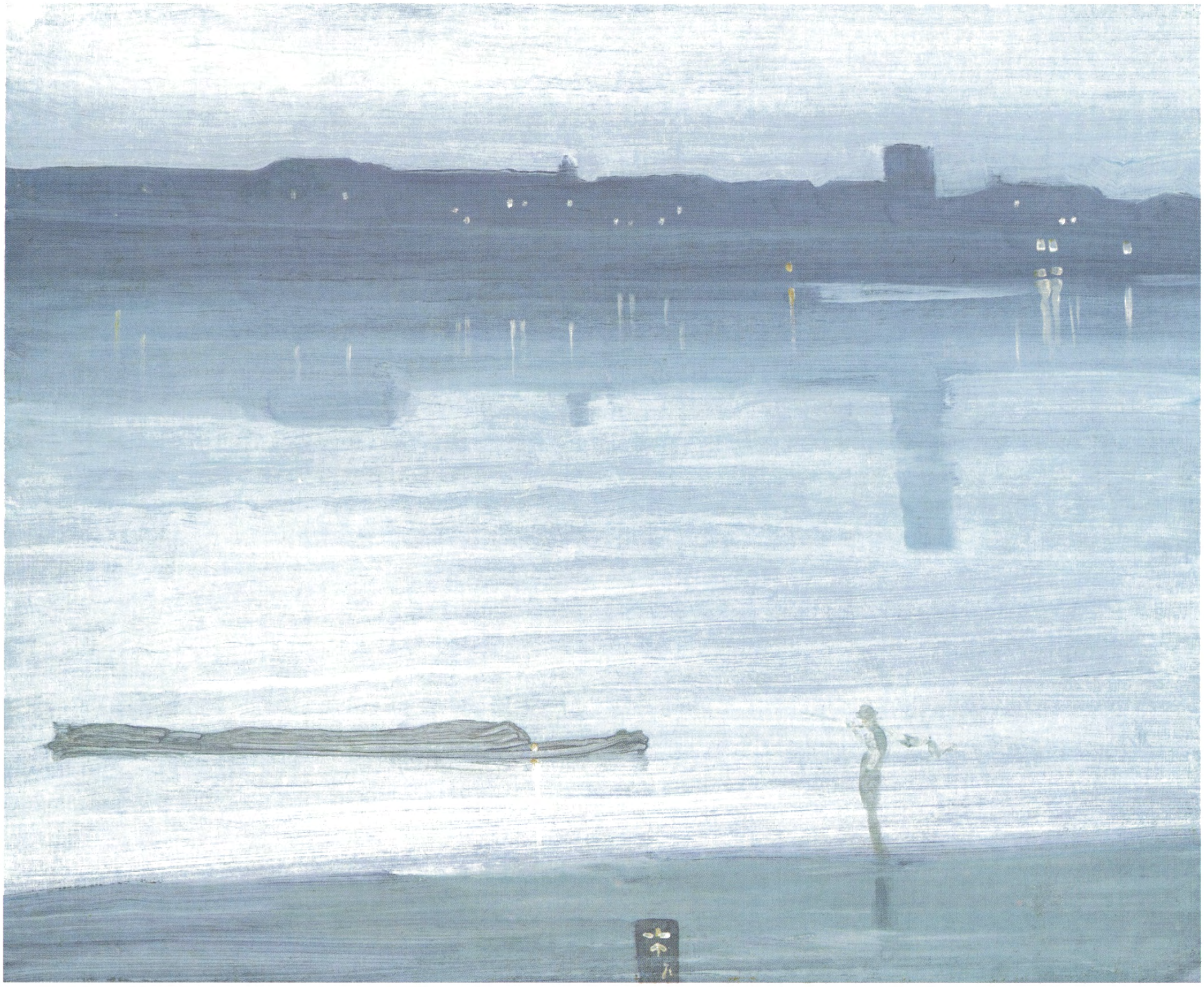


Fig. 3.62. James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Silver—Chelsea*, 1871. Oil on wood support, 19¾ x 24 in. Tate Gallery.

the night itself—the night in its loveliness and mystery."[101] As noted by his biographers, it took the fresh eye of an American expatriate like Whistler to fathom what the denizens of London had overlooked or found unworthy of art. "Night, beautiful everywhere from Valparaiso to Venice, is never more beautiful than in London. First he painted the Thames in the gray day, but, as time went on, he painted it in the blue night. Only those who have lived by the river for years, as we have, can realize the truth as well as the beauty of the Nocturnes. He still, like Courbet, 'loved things for what they were,' but he chose the exquisite, the poetic. The foolishness of Nature never appealed to him. But Courbet was no more a realist than Whistler if realism means truth."[102]

For Whistler to capture the artistic truth, which transforms the mundane and everyday to an imaginative essence, he needed to invent new technical means. In *Nocturne: Blue and Silver—Chelsea*, 1871 (fig. 3.62), one of Whistler's first Nocturnes painted from the window of his Lindsey Row home, the artist has depicted the intense blue tonalities of the river between the Westminster and Battersea bridges at twilight, a reflective, irradiating light that tints all with a harmonizing glow, yet defines subtle variations of tone, invisible in stronger light. The creamy pigment slathered over the dark gray undertone—the barge in the foreground like a child's finger painting—reveals these halftones wonderfully. For his scene, Whistler chose an hour when the normally busy river was empty of traffic, when his pure delight in the lucent transformation of receding planes might trump the reality of a Thames that was, in his day, little more than an open sewer, so choked with the foul effluvium of the city that the river was a dead zone for fish.

Surprisingly, given that the Nocturnes would prove controversial and remain the subject of derision for the next two decades, an early review in the London *Times* of Whistler's work was not only sympathetic to the artistic strategies Whistler pursued, but captured the artist's aims: "They are illustrations of the theory . . . that painting is so closely akin to music that the colours of one may and should be used, like the ordered sounds of the other; that painting should not aim at expressing dramatic emotions, depicting incidents of history or recording facts of nature, but should be content with molding out moods and stirring our imaginations, by subtle combinations of colour, through which all that painting has to say to us can be said, and beyond which painting has no valuable or true speech whatever."[103]

Whistler and Memory

Whistler's development of memory as an artistic tool, influenced many of the artist's followers, and fundamentally differentiated his method from that of the Impressionists. Whistler would work from a balcony overlooking the Thames, or have a friend or follower row him out into the middle of the river, where he would remain for hours trying to memorize the scene: a few rooflines, window light, lamps here and there, the quality and variety of tone that became visible in subdued light. He found color notes were difficult to record on the spot in the dark and so became expert at memorizing. He would be very disciplined and exacting in trying to put to memory his observations, sometimes repeating observations out loud to companions and asking for verification of their accuracy. Later in the studio, working quickly with thinned paints, Whistler would try to get the memory—the impression that remained in his mind—down on canvas. This constituted a crucial difference between Impressionist plein-air painting and Tonalist painting. Both begin with the data of place and moment—the quasi-scientific recording of light in the outdoors—but the Tonalist tended to record the experience through memory, or memory notes, for later use indoors. In the studio, as the memory or afterimage held in the mind's eye was put down on canvas, the art object itself began to make its own demands; thus, an internal dynamic took over and the artist had to ultimately satisfy the aesthetic dictates of the art object. The original inspiration, the impulse to capture form, color, and tone, took second place to the formal values required by the work of art, at least in the exacting determination of the artist. Or, as the Pennells described it: "But looking at color and arrangement by night, and retaining the memory until the next morning simply means a longer interval between observation and execution."[104]

Many artists who observed Whistler at work commented on his uncanny ability to have the whole concept of the picture in mind when he faced the empty canvas. It was at the point of retrospective inspiration, the moment of creation through imagination and memory, that the modernist, the conceptualist artist, took flight in Whistler. "Few painters have understood the art of selection [the Nocturnes], and here Hiroshige and the others Japanese were of use. He [Whistler] went to Nature for the motive, to the Japanese for the design . . . In no other paintings was Whistler as successful in following his own precepts and concealing tracers of toil. One touch less and nothing would be left; one touch more and the spell would be broken, and night stripped of mystery . . . Now everyone can see, and 'night is like a Whistler,' for Whistler compelled people to look at his pictures, until it has become impossible to look at night without seeing the Nocturnes. He painted the impression that night made on him, and the great artist, like the great author, moves people until they think they see things as he does."[105] It was this fundamentally subjective methodology that the Symbolists derived from Whistler. It was, too, the kind of art that lives and breathes, that emerges from memory, imagination, and association: the felt life that decades later Mark Rothko found was essential to his disembodied art: "I will say without reservations that from my view there can be no abstractions. Any shape or area which has not the pulsating concreteness of real flesh and bones, its vulnerability to pleasure or pain, is nothing at all. Any picture which does not provide the environment in which the breath of life can be drawn does not interest me."[106]

The art historian Robert Rosenblum has noted the influence of Whistler on Rothko, both in their shared spiritual imperatives and Rothko's love of stark, if sensuously painted, pictures. "But even when his ascetic spirit reigns, Rothko can still be seen as a master of exquisite nuance who works within the realm of veiled tonal refinement that was first espoused by Whistler ... In his seascapes, in particular, Whistler's vision often strikes chords that resound in Rothko's direction, as in his translations of waterside views of the Thames into mysterious scrims of subtly filtered light.... Matter, gravity, perspective have been banished in favor of a spectral world of tiered and floating planes that seem both as immediate as the picture surface itself and as remote as something seen behind closed eyes. Even Whistler's favored format, two or three broad zones of the haziest tonalities both fused and separated by the glimmer of a horizon line, announces the structural combination of elemental clarity and infinitely varied subtlety that Rothko would make his own.... Milton Avery ... who exhibited together with Rothko as early as 1928 and is usually cited as a formative influence on him, also belongs to the Whistlerian, Anglo-American tradition of puritanical aestheticism...."[107]

This puritanical streak of visual iconoclasm (including the banishing of all narrative or pietistic content) has been noted in regard to Whistler since his own day: the preference for clean, unadulterated spaces, designs, and arrangements that allowed the purity of the composition to stand clear. Whistler's aesthetic stance, akin to forms of religious abstinence, resonated deeply with his American followers, who felt their landscape art expressed an analogous spiritual conviction. And in the Nocturnes, Whistler's desire for a profound and singular expression became a near-obsession. His technique, as the artist described it to the Pennells, and from the observations of his assistants, confirms the role of both ambiguity and exactitude—if not serendipity and accident—in his approach. "Whistler told us that he used a medium composed of copal, mastic, and turpentine ... When Whistler had arranged his color-scheme on the palette, the canvas, which the pupils prepared, was stood on an easel, but so much 'sauce' was used that frequently it had to be thrown flat on the floor to keep the whole thing from running off. He washed the liquid color on, lightening and darkening the tones as he worked. In the Nocturnes, the sky and water are rendered with great sweeps of the brush of exactly the right tone ... If the tones were right, he took them off his palette and kept them until the next day, in saucers, or gallipots, under water, so hat he might carry on his work in the same way with the same tones."[108]

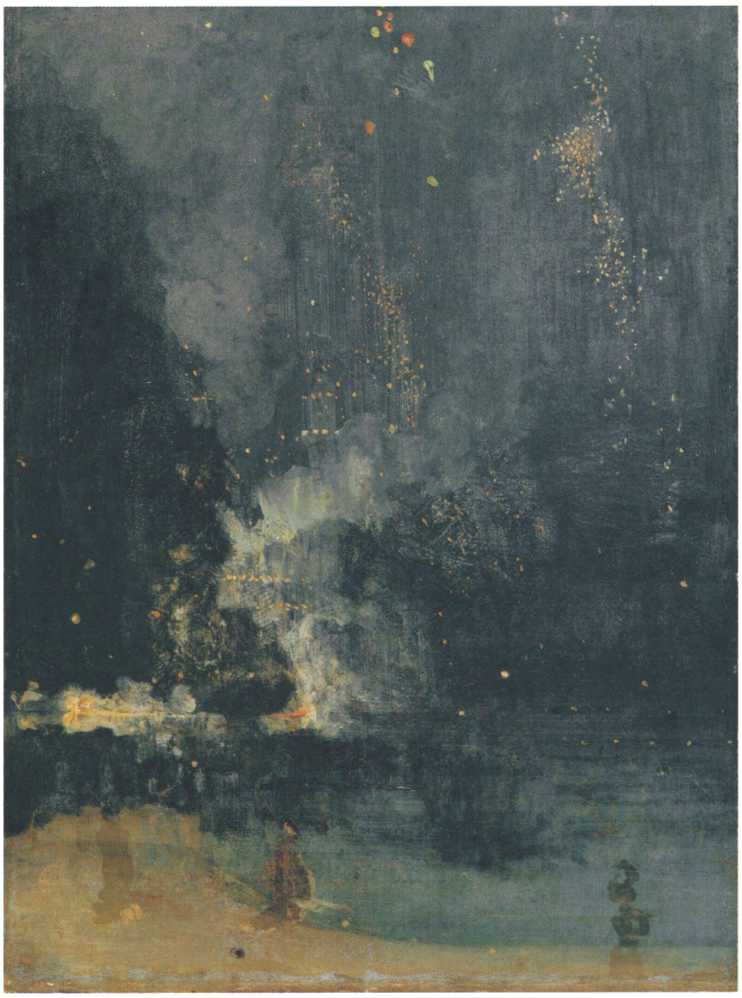


Fig. 3.63. James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875. Oil on panel, 23 x 18 in. The Detroit Institute of Arts, gift of Dexter M. Ferry, Jr.

In the famous trial in which Whistler brought suit against the English art critic John Ruskin for disparaging one of his Nocturnes as "a pot of paint in the public's face"—referring to *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket*, 1875 (fig. 3.63)—the artist attempted to make clear that what seemed slipshod and arbitrary was actually carefully contrived and based on a lifetime of dedicated experience. He was also intent on differentiating his formal and pictorial approach from the prevailing norms of storytelling art. "By using the word 'nocturne' I wished to indicate an artistic interest alone, divesting the picture of any outside anecdotal interest which might have been otherwise attached to it. A nocturne is an arrangement of line, form, and color first. The picture is throughout a problem that I attempt to solve. I make use of any means, any incident or object in nature that will bring about this symmetrical result."[109]

The experimental aspect of the Nocturnes—the thinned pigment so volatile and unstable as to require being laid flat on the floor, where presumably it was manipulated by Whistler—would pass today as a Conceptualist strategy. Little separates

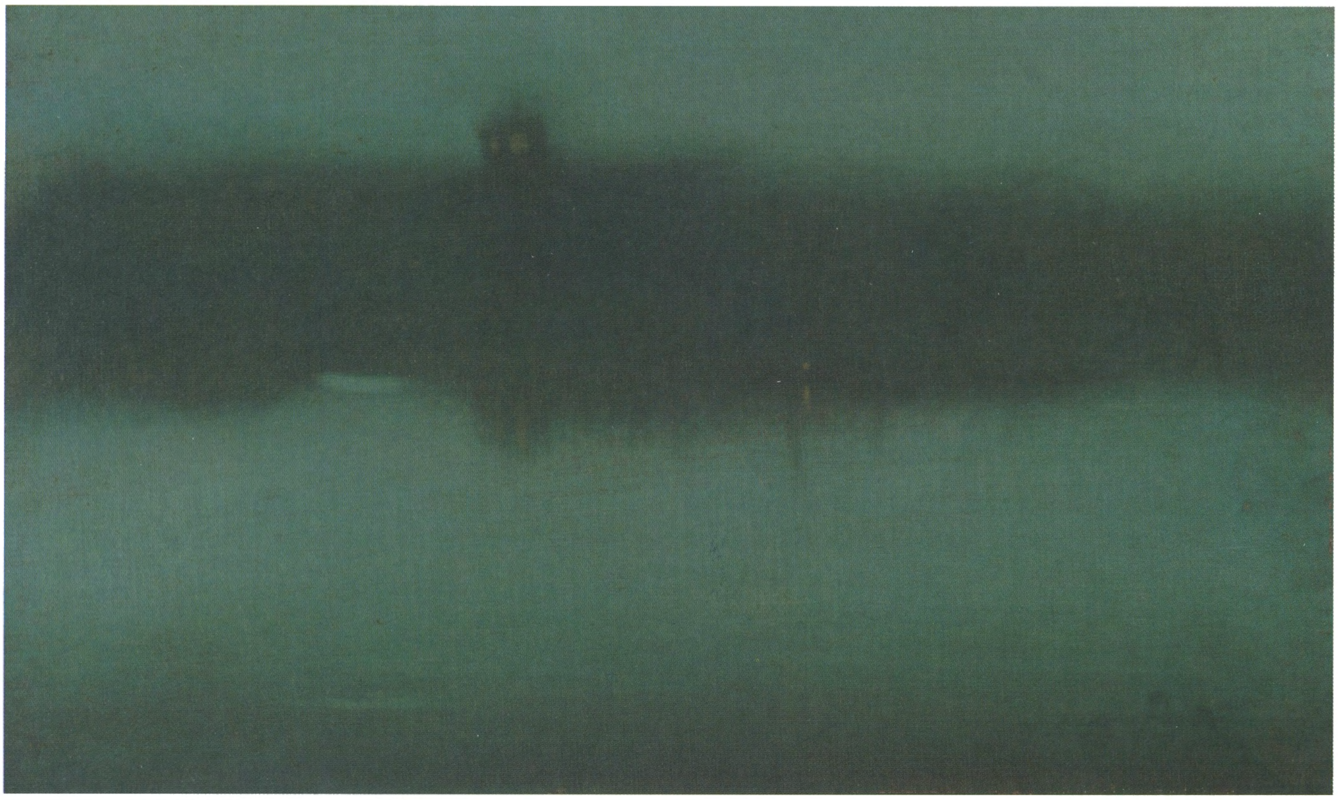


Fig. 3.64. James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Grey and Silver*, 1873–75. Oil on canvas, 12¼ x 20⅜ in. Philadelphia Museum of Art. John G. Johnson Collection, 1917.

Nocturne: Grey and Silver, 1873–75 (fig. 3.64), from the floating planes found in Mark Rothko's paintings, right down to the way the ground of the canvas absorbs the pigment so that the horizontals of river, embankment, and sky are more like ghostly stains bleeding through to the surface, a technique that Whistler explained to his disciple Otto Bacher in 1881: "Paint should not be applied thick. It should be like breath on the surface of a pane of glass."[110] When Whistler wrote of his art, he emphasized the transformative role of the artist, mediating between the things of this world and the spiritual epiphanies available to the gifted. "And when the evening mist clothes the riverside with 'poetry' as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky and the tall chimneys become campanile, and the warehouses are palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and the fairy land is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home, the workman and the cultured one, the wise and the one of pleasures cease to understand as they have ceased to see, and nature, who for once has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artists alone, her son and her master; her son in that he loves her, and her master in that he knows her."[111]

Whistler's Venice

In America, Whistler was a larger-than-life celebrity and avatar of exquisite refinement before his art was well known to American audiences. His portraits and genre works had

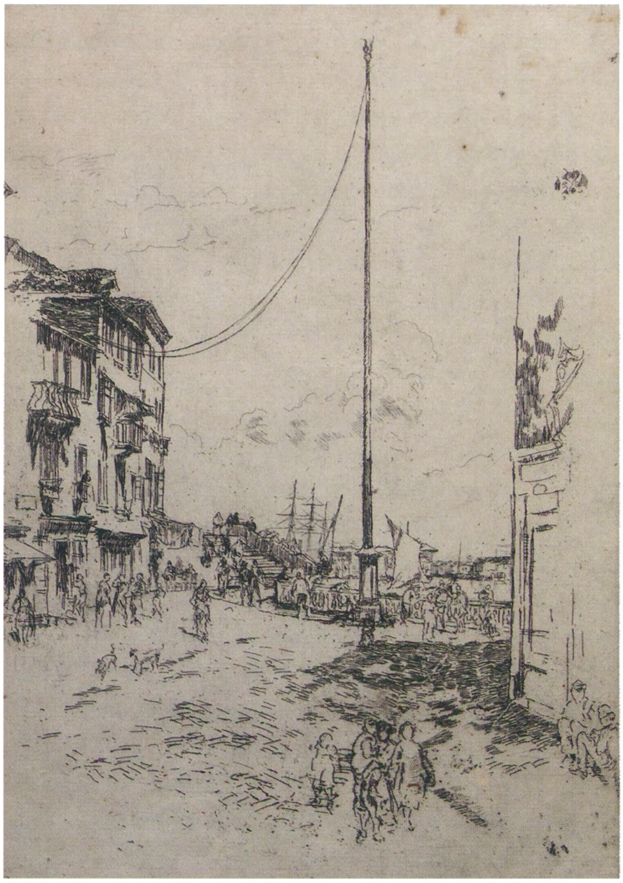


Fig. 3.65. James McNeill Whistler, *The Little Mast*, 1879–80. Etching, 10½ x 7¼ in. Private collection.

been briefly exhibited in America in the 1860s and early 1870s and reports on his tussle with Ruskin in 1878 were well known to American readers. But it was the Whistler of Venice—the master of etching and pastel, that established Whistler's early influence and then fame in America. An etching like *The Little Mast*, 1879–80 (fig. 3.65), with its airy simplicity, hinted-at details, and informal yet sophisticated formal design elements, set a new standard in progressive circles. The young American artists who knew him, or knew of him and his work, could not get enough. While in Venice during 1879–80, Whistler became associated with a group of rising American artists under the tutelage of Frank Duveneck. The "Duveneck Boys," young artists on the make, spread Whistler's gospel far and wide among their countrymen. Artists like Jerome Blum, John White Alexander, Otto Bacher, William Gedney Bunce, Henry Muhrman, and Joseph Pennell, along with Duveneck (and by close association, Twachtman) became instrumental in transmitting Whistler's technical refinements and aesthetic breakthroughs throughout America. The size and medium of Whistler's Venice etchings and pastels allowed them to travel well and be exhibited and purchased in America. The result was a revival for both mediums and increased sophistication among young American artists in terms of formal compositional strategies and the use of subtle tonalities.

Whistler arrived in Venice in September 1879, reeling from the aftershock of his libel trial against Ruskin and personal bankruptcy, which had resulted in the loss of his home and studio and the dispersal of many of his paintings. He had a contract with the Fine Arts Society to produce twelve etchings of Venice; he would do many more—all exquisite, including a dazzling group of pastels, which would revolutionize the medium. Venice became a kind of transformative alembic for Whistler. Removed from his habitual haunts of Chelsea and Paris and without his infrastructure of hangers-on, he was forced to dig deep within himself, seize on his talent and technical brilliance, and find a fresh take on Venice—a Venice that Henry James considered to have already been exhausted in terms of a fresh artistic viewpoint. In the same way he made the foggy Thames his own, Whistler discovered a Venice within Venice, the backwater Venice unknown to all but the most intrepid tourists. In the cold winter of 1879–80—and he suffered from the cold—Whistler found inspiration that galvanized his art and renewed his confidence. Whistler's Venice contained little of the famous views and well-known monuments; it was a Venice of tiny canals, hidden doorways, shadowy campi, the crepuscular and mysterious moments as the light fails and night falls. The effects he was after were fleeting and deliquescent, his marking of line and color often barely discernible from the colored backgrounds of his supports. Many were like afterimages, vague patterns of color and form, as in *View in Venice, Looking Toward the Molo*, 1879–80 (fig. 3.66). Whistler's Venice is less about place and more about muted surface form and crystalline atmosphere charged with fading light, reflected and refracted and distorted by the ambient atmosphere; light hovers like a palpable presence between sky and water, the meeting of substance and air a thing of mystery: soft, ephemeral, quiescent. It is an envelope of atmosphere as friable as chalky pastel on toned paper, intoning the crumbling damp of salt-stained stucco walls, of rarefied silverpoint line and smoky retroussage on antique Dutch paper. It is light translated into art, a rhythmic essence worked up in coruscating form, tone, and color. Like his renditions of the Thames, Whistler's pastels, etchings, and a few oils transformed the way later generations understood and appreciated Venice. Whistler's art became the inescapable Venetian looking glass.

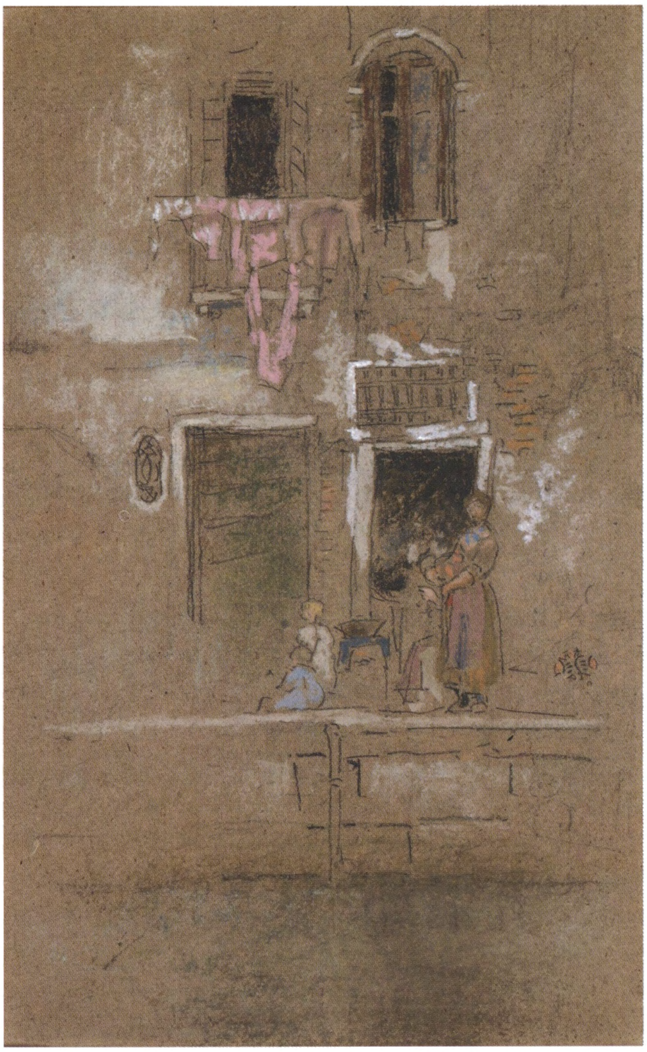


Fig. 3.66. James McNeill Whistler, *Note in Pink and Brown*, c. 1880. Charcoal and pastel on dark brown wove paper, 11¾ x 7¼ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1917 (17.975).

In one of his most atmospheric etchings, *Nocturne*, 1879–80 (fig. 3.67), Whistler created a monochromatic image full of plate tone, with each version varying enormously according to the amount of ink left on the plate before printing. Each print is

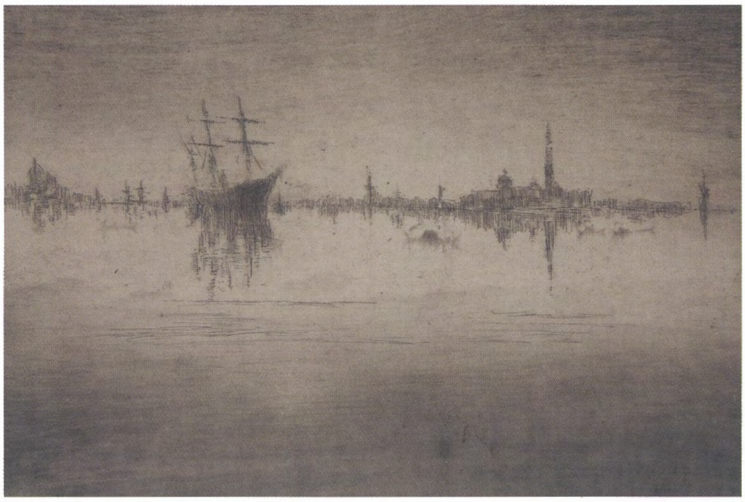


Fig. 3.67. James McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne*, 1879–80. Etching, 8 x 11 in. Private collection.

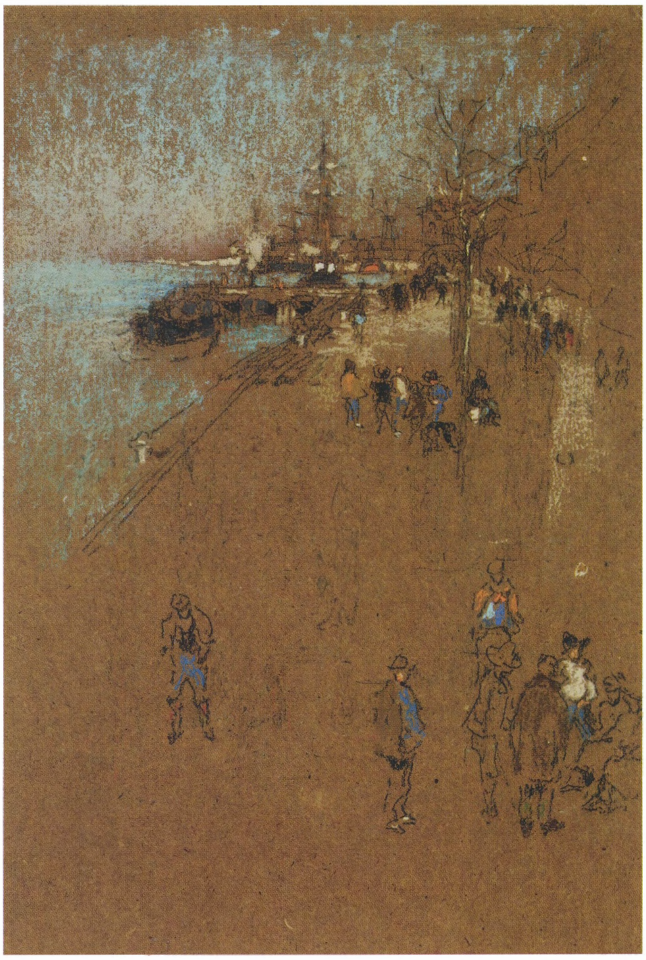


Fig. 3.68. James McNeill Whistler, *The Zattere; Harmony in Blue and Brown*, 1879–80. Pastel with black chalk on brown paper, 11 x 7⅝ in. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago, Daniel J. Terra Collection, 1992.162.

a virtual monotype. The effectiveness of the compositionrelies on the contrast between the delicate etched lines of the ship and the city shoreline, and the broad areas of shadowy ink representing lagoon and sky. In this example, the horizontal wiping creates vertical zones of dark to light, both suggesting a recession in space across the lagoon and a palpable hovering gloom. The atmosphere shimmers and vibrates as the numerous half-tones play off one another. *Nocturne* displays Whistler's tonal art in its starkest and most dramatic range between black and sepia-cream; the intervening grays are vibrant and full of rhythmic movement. More heavily inked versions have a dramatic surface quality, while in less-inked versions details merge and fade into near-nothingness.

Whistler's minimalist pastels of Venice revolutionized the medium and, as will be seen in the following chapter, had a profound effect on the appreciation of watercolor and pastel in American art of the 1880s and beyond. Whistler discovered a cache of colored paper—brown, pink, and blue—in a warehouse near the Merceria, which energized his inspiration. In *The Zattere; Harmony in Blue and Brown*, 1879–80 (fig. 3.68), the artist let the toned ground of the paper stand in for much of the pictorial composition, using black lines and spare jottings of color to depict high notes and low accents. For Whistler, the picturesque is simply the starting point for an arrangement and pleasing harmony of surface colors as they appear in a dim setting. In both etchings and pastels, he employed what he described as a Japanese drawing method: initially concentrating on the central focus of the composition where most detail is elaborated, and then working outward and away from the area of central interest, leaving the peripheral areas bare or sketchy as if unfinished. The result of this severe triage of unimportant visual information was an exquisite, yet dramatic rendition, often with singular effects of light, color, or atmospheric mood. In *Under the Frari,* circa 1879–80 (fig. 3.69), the toned paper left bare throughout gives the pastel a unifying harmony; the overall feel of spontaneity and freedom yields highly decorative patterns and intriguing color arrangements, while eliciting a vivid sense of Venetian street life. This deft minimalist approach was much at odds with the standard depictions of picturesque Venice at the time, much less the prevailing tradition that treated pastel merely as another form of painting. When Whistler's pastels were exhibited in London after his return in late 1880, they were initially scorned by the critics for being facile and unfinished—more jokes played by Whistler on a credulous audience. But his fellow artists and a few connoisseurs understood; and his first pastel show in London generated favorable sales. The sketchlike quality in Whistler's work (what the unenlightened thought unfinished) and the artist's highlighting of only a few pertinent points in his composition, especially in his small-scale examples, became the newest thing—*the* modern style—among the younger artists in America.

For the young and impressionable artists in the Duveneck circle, the Venice pastels were a revelation. These mostly Munich-trained Americans, many influenced by Currier,

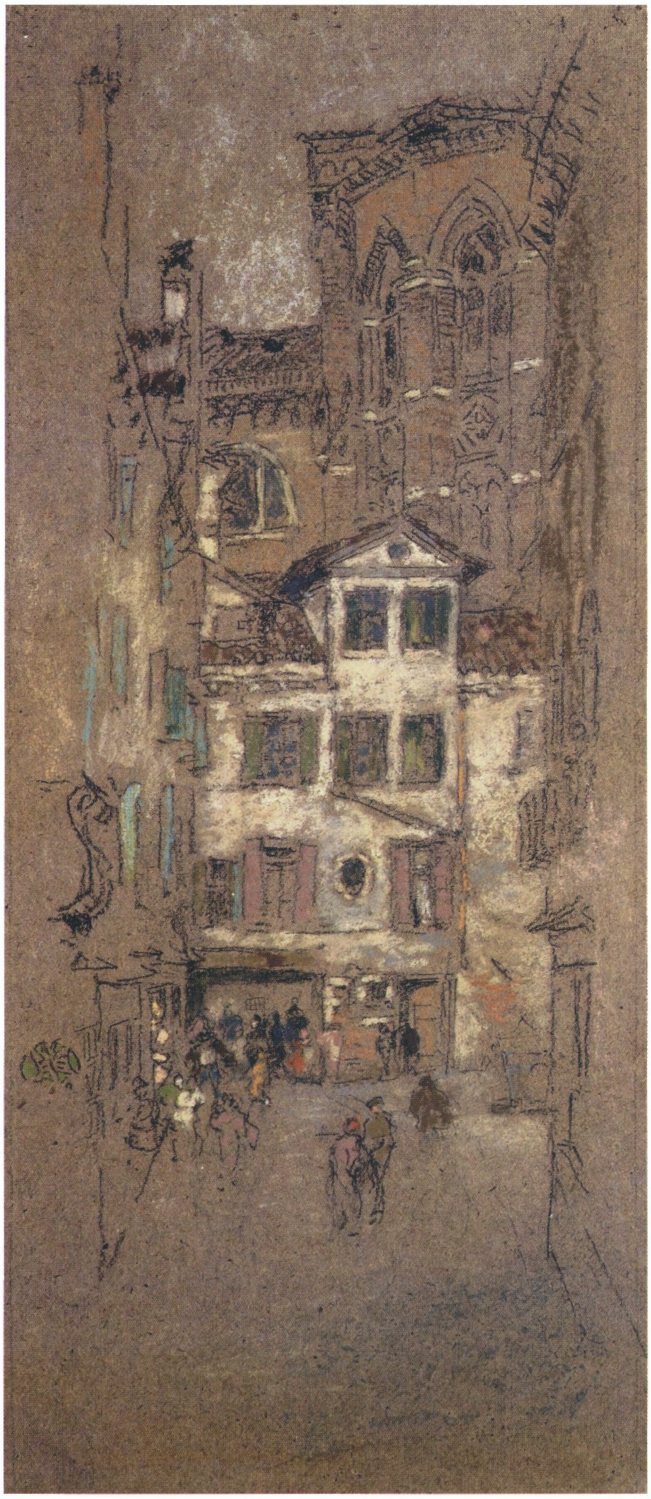


Fig. 3.69. James McNeill Whistler, *Under the Frari*, c. 1879–80. Chalk and pastel on brown paper, 11 x 5 in. Colby College Museum of Art, The Lunder Collection.

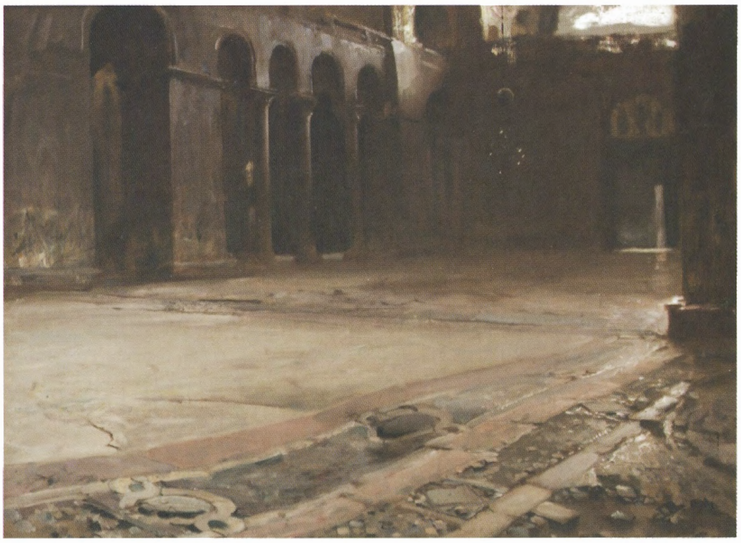


Fig. 3.70. John Singer Sargent, *Pavement of St. Mark's, Venice*, c. 1880–82. Oil on canvas, 21 x 28½ in. Courtesy Adelson Galleries.

approached Whistler with some awe and trepidation. His reputation and talent, his biting sarcasm and gospel of high art had preceded him. The wide-eyed Americans hung on his every word and observed him closely; and he in turn reached out to his countrymen and shared his methods, encouraging their efforts. Perhaps because he was out of his normal milieu, or perhaps because he was flattered by his compatriots' near-reverence, Whistler embraced the attention of his countrymen. Otto Bacher would later write that although Whistler could be scathing of a competitor's work, "His criticism of a student's work was in an entirely different tone."[112] John White Alexander, who adopted many of Whistler's methods, noted the master's gentle ways. "Instead of criticizing the picture, he spoke only in the kindliest manner, suggesting where the composition might be improved, and where a color needed a higher tone.... He did not try to be censorious at all, only helpful."[113] An American artist from Baltimore, Harper Pennington, who was probably well aware of Whistler's London reputation, noted, "It was impossible to describe how gently Mr. Whistler, poking a little kindly fun, taught us to see the stupidity of our garish efforts. Never once was there a word spoken by him which could offend the touchiest of touchy geniuses. With unending patience, by his own example chiefly, the great man led the small ones on from point to point until some of his own sweet reasonableness was grasped by his eager followers."[114]

Frank Duveneck, an inspirational figure and accomplished craftsman in his own right, was, nevertheless, enthralled with Whistler's ability to capture the essence of his subject. Duveneck's etching style (see figs 5.49, 5.51, and 5.52) owed much to Whistler, and Whistler's much to Duveneck. Otto Bacher (see figs 5.54 and 5.55), also an eager student of printmaking, would learn a great deal about the use of plate tone from Whistler. The American artist Jerome Blum, while not one of Duveneck's students, was in Venice at the same time as Whistler and quickly became an influential exponent of Whistler's reductive methods of focusing on the suggestive essence, especially in his pastels. Later, as a founding member of the Society of Pastel Painters in New York in the early 1880s, Blum would further promote Whistlerian modes. A young John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) was also in Venice in 1880 and he, too, was influenced by Whistler's subtle tonalities and off-kilter views in his Venetian interiors and back alleys *Pavement of St. Mark's, Venice*, circa 1880–82 (fig. 3.70). William Gedney Bunce, working in Venice around the time Whistler was there, would make his career painting Venetian sunsets, extrapolating the abstract essence of Whistler's art in matchless tone poems of fiery lit lagoons and sky. Twachtman, though he did not overlap with Whistler in Venice, knew of his work and style from his many friends in Duveneck's crowd. Twachtman's pastels of the 1880s and later were fundamentally influenced by Whistler. Henry Muhrman, another member of the Duveneck circle, worked in Venice in 1881 with Twachtman, Duveneck, Bacher, and Blum, and was deeply influenced by Whistler throughout his career, exhibiting with him in London in the 1890s. Joseph Pennell (see figs. 5.56–5.58), who worked in Venice in the 1880s, and for decades later, also came under the spell of Whistler, adopting many elements of his style and becoming both friend and biographer. Pennell wrote in his autobiography how he came to imbibe the fundamental lesson of Whistler: art is all about feeling. "I found out, too, that I must also give the feeling of the place, really the feeling, the impression, it made on me. This is impressionism and not the putting down of spots, blots, cubes, or other mannerisms. This is the impressionism of Piero della Francesca, Velásquez, Claude, Turner, Constable, Whistler. It is not rendering the subject as it is, but giving the sensation it makes on you, and if that sensation is strong enough, others will feel it.... as Whistler said, 'Nature is seldom right.' One must draw always from nature, as he did; be her master and know her, her servant and love her. But this takes 'the knowledge of a lifetime.'"[115]

For the artists who came to Venice in the decades before World War I, Whistler was a larger-than-life figure, almost a titular saint, given the number of stories about him, proliferating like hagiography, that were passed around in artistic circles. While sitting down at the local cafés, at Florian's or the Oriental on the Riva, the young artists would exchange humorous anecdotes about Whistler's days in Venice. His legend marked the city; there was simply no escaping the flourish and dash of his style. As late as 1907, the modernist artist John Marin, as much as he might deny it, could not resist Whistler's subtle use of wiping ink over his plates to gain a soft atmospheric quality in his etching *Ca' d'Oro* (fig. 3.71).

In effect, Whistler saved Venice from the treacly narrative genre art of his day, and later from the bright Impressionist confections of the shopworn picturesque that would threaten to turn the city into a glittering cliché. Rather than depict the enchanting summer playground of the world-weary traveler, he turned to the bare bones of Venice in winter, at dusk, or on a moonlit night, searching out the city's quirky symmetries and odd repeating patterns. As in *The Two Doorways*, 1880 (fig. 3.72), he veiled everything in shimmering opalescent tones of rarest color and delicate filigree, capturing the intimate immaterial soul of the lagoon city as no one before.

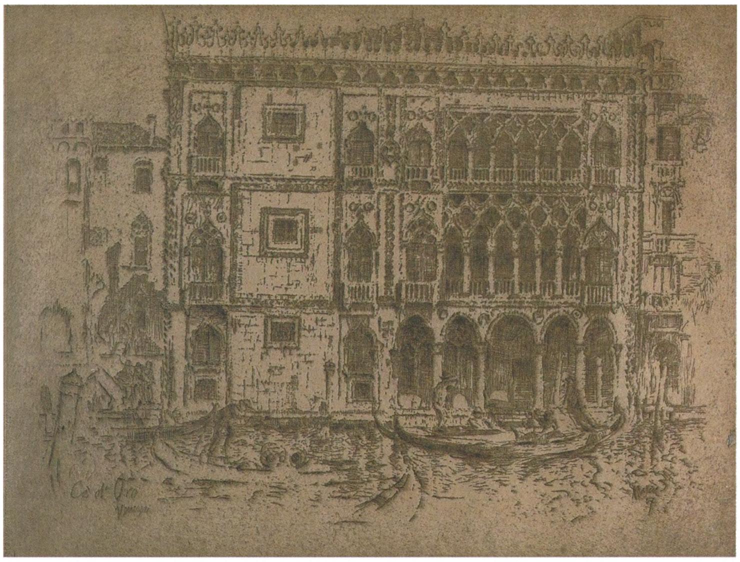


Fig. 3.71. John Marin, *Ca' d'Oro*, 1907. Etching, 7 x 9 in. Private collection.

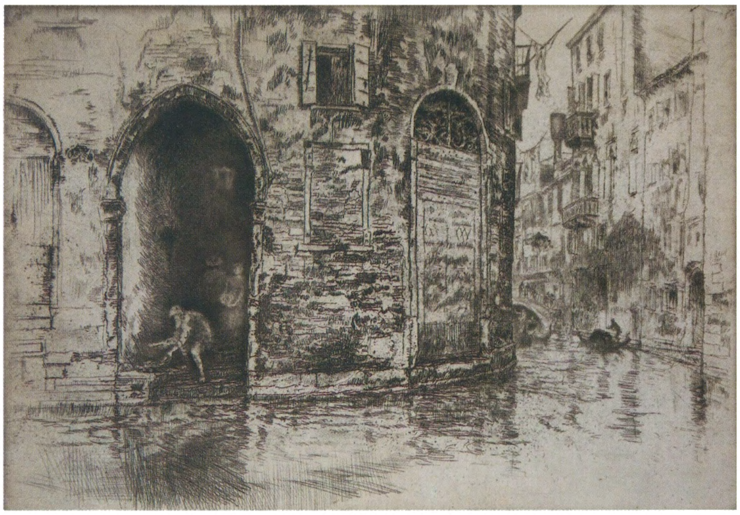


Fig. 3.72. James McNeill Whistler, *The Two Doorways*, 1880. Etching, 7⅞ x 11⅜ in. Private collection.

Whistlerian Tonalism: Branding the Age

It is not easy in the twenty-first century to recognize how radical and unsettling the Nocturnes were to the London art world of the 1870s and well into the 1880s, before response to Whistler's style became less hostile and slowly more accepting, as younger and more enlightened artists and critics began to understand and appreciate the artist's qualities. One marvels at the artistic fortitude it must have required of Whistler to follow his own path in the face of such criticism. From the 1870s on, Whistler embarked on a relentless campaign to win over followers and sympathetic friends, and finally vanquish his foes and bring the British art establishment to heel. He was focused and systematic; he used his name, his art, his style—his signature butterfly, his very public persona—and turned them into a name brand to sell the product. He then proceeded to market all things Whistler in one of the most brilliant branding campaigns in history, until his name was on everyone's lips, a name synonymous with art for art's sake and the Aesthetic movement.

But it was in America, that Whistler's brand struck deep, imperishable roots. His form of visual iconoclasm—focused on essentials, spiritualizing, uplifting, showing more than telling, hinting always at some mysterious fleeting beauty or truth beyond immediate reckoning—became an American way of seeing for almost three decades.

His suave butterfly signature, in the hands of his American followers, morphed into elegant monograms and flowing signatures. His black-and-white dandified attire, his cane and monocle and mustache, the white curl on his forehead, were endlessly caricatured in the press. His quick laconic wit and his precisely chiseled prose—every comma was carefully placed—his priceless retorts to the press over every slight he endured, became bywords. Whistler decorated his homes, studios, and exhibitions in muted complementary colors—yellows and off-whites were his favorites—to better show off his art. He placed hangings over his studio windows to create the muted light he loved to paint; he hung a velarium over the skylights in his exhibition spaces to reduce reflections and create an even light in which his Tonalist art could best be viewed.[116] In exhibitions he organized, he hung works on a line in spare and clean arrangements to give the individual works breathing space for proper viewing. He created simple reeded frames, elegant and abstract, to complement the lowered tonalities of his work. He fostered myths about his life style and encouraged their proliferation. Readily taking on followers, Whistler just as easily dropped them, keeping himself surrounded by a kind of fluid entourage of helpers, hangers-on, young artists, and fellow aesthetes—all to better keep his name and fame in play throughout the lean years of the 1870s and 1880s. Ubiquitous in society and cultural circles, he was rarely out of the press and could not resist jumping into one controversy or another just to keep the pot of his celebrity stirred. He picked fights and instigated lawsuits. He lived and breathed his art. And from 1880 on, the American public and his artist followers were in thrall to Whistler's accomplishment and international celebrity.

Much of Whistler's conduct was pure theater, a way of disguising the enormous effort and ego invested in his rarefied enterprise. As so many American artists discovered in the 1880s, to their chagrin, the Tonalist mode at the heart of Whistler's style was a stern unrelenting taskmaster; its seeming simplicity, its effortless execution and dramatic essences—the illusion of a premier coup—was a profoundly difficult thing to get right. Every element, form, tone, and color had to fit seamlessly in a harmonious whole. Whistler's genius was akin to second sight: to know the outcome he desired, to have the thing exist in his imagination and face the protean struggle of capturing the dream in paint, pastel, and inked line for the world to know. He worried and fretted endlessly to improve his work; he never stopped experimenting; and he never stopped changing nor ceased to prospect for new inspiration.

It is difficult for observers today to recapture the esteem in which Whistler was held by his contemporaries and followers. Charles de Kay wrote in 1903 that in his depictions of landscape, Whistler "set a mark not reached by any of the great departed, not even by Turner, nor as yet equaled by our living landscapists. The etchings are easily the greatest in their kind ... in painting also he stands among the first of all time."[117] The critic John Van Dyke, writing in 1919, noted that Whistler had handed down the great tradition of art, but in a modern guise. "Since his death his influence has been more far-reaching than that of any modern. His pictures were not only adopted, assimilated, imitated in England and France but all over Europe. Here in America the exhibitions still show his color schemes and arrangements as comprehended by his admiring young converts. Without taking on pupils, as Couture and Gleyre had done, he nevertheless became far more of a *chef d'École* than either of them".[118] Sadakichi Hartmann, one of the foremost champions of modernism, wrote that Whistler had become synonymous with his era—an era he had done much to shape. "Living in London, with a view on the Thames, he realized that the aspects of modern life have turned gray ... Our large cities with their smoke and manifold exhalations (not to speak of communities subjected to the use of soft coal) have acquired a dust-laden, misty atmosphere. This peculiarity of city atmosphere, however, to be noticed in London and Paris as much as in Chicago and Pittsburgh, is a wonderful subduer and eliminator of detail, and should prove a valuable ally in conquering new suggestions of light effects. This Whistler realized, and he used it to express what the inner life of things in modern art needed most to express, the poetry of paint expressed in tone and light. 'The study of light *per se*,' as Leon Dabo says, 'had become a creed with Monet, Manet and their followers. Somehow Whistler's contribution to this *naissance*—for it was a real birth, first successfully carried out by Constable—has been entirely neglected for the more obvious quality of full sunlight produced by the so-called Impressionists. Whistler's paintings prove conclusively that where there is harmony of colour there is vibration of atmosphere, and, therefore, the illusion of light.' ... This is more than a technical change, it is a new way of thinking ... the 'psychological style' of painting ... By this we wish to convey that the figures tell us something of the inner life, and that the way in which this is accomplished impresses us like a commentary on their souls ... Tone is the ideal of the modern painter. It is his highest ambition. It is the powerful subduer

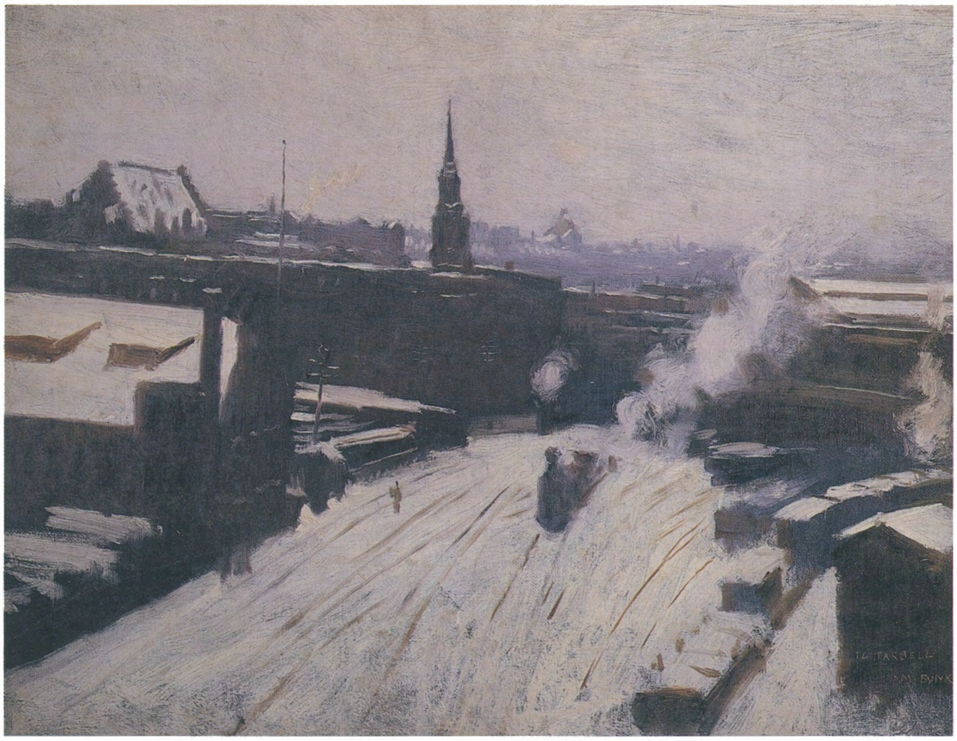


Fig. 3.73. Dennis Miller Bunker, *The Station*, c. 1886–89. Oil on canvas, 14⅛ x 18⅛ in. Godel Fine Art.

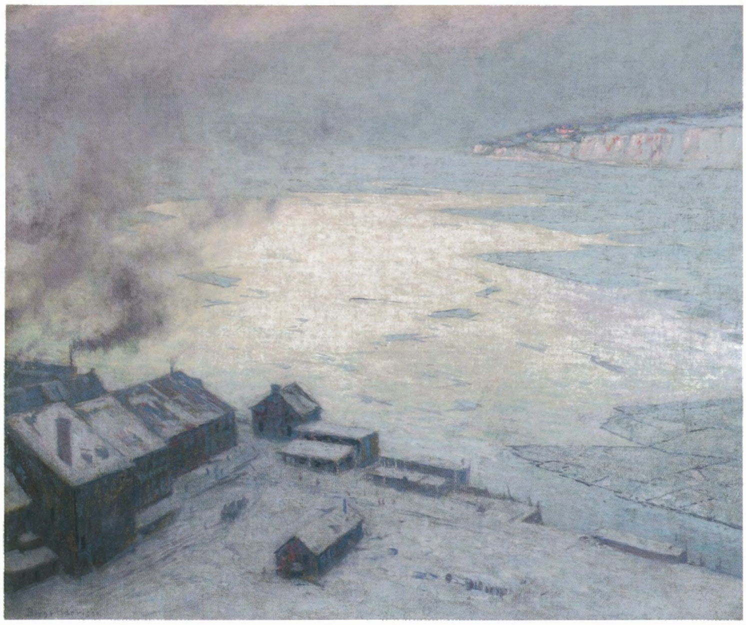


Fig. 3.74. Birge Harrison, *Sunset from Quebec*, c. 1895. Oil on board, 25⅛ x 30¼ in. Questroyal Fine Art.

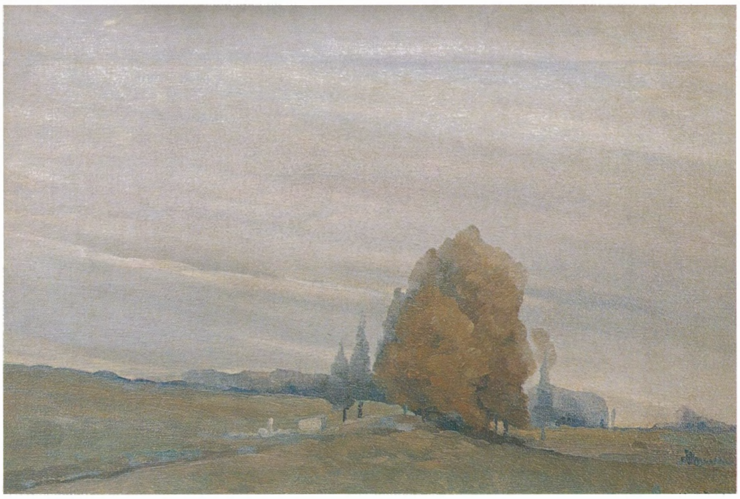


Fig. 3.75. Leon Dabo, *Gray Poplars*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 15 x 22 in. Private collection.

of all the incongruities of modern art ... Gray is the colour of modern life ... even the Impressionists ... are pursuing the gray phantom of modern art ... We take delight today in subtler gradations, in semi and quarter tones, the losing of forms in mystic shadows, a restless, suggestive technique of mobile touches, nervous sparkles, of delicate broken tints that show a hundred differentiations. And this over-sensitiveness and fastidious objection to strong contrast, this love for the externals of technique, raising brushwork to a higher pedestal than the idea, has much to do with the exclusiveness of modern painting and the keener appreciation for monochrome."[119]

For more than thirty years, from the late 1870s right through the first decade of the twentieth century, Whistler's influence was felt everywhere in American art and was a source of inspiration and a constant dynamic challenge to the finest artists in the Tonalist movement (figs. 3.73–3.75). Even artists of an Impressionist bent, like Theodore Robinson (1852–96, fig. 3.76), who came under the spell of Monet and Giverny, found it hard to resist Whistler, as well as the market forces for Tonalist landscapes he helped unleash and sustain. The American artist Edwin Austin Abbey, a close friend of Whistler, writing in 1903 after Whistler's death, was clear: Whistler had changed the way a generation looked at the world (fig. 3.77). "Few men have made so great a mark upon their time and few men have left their work so complete. He taught men to see something very subtle that *he* saw. He painted completely what he wished to show them, and left no lose ends behind him for others to perfect. I think very few artists have done this. Some have—but mighty few."[120]

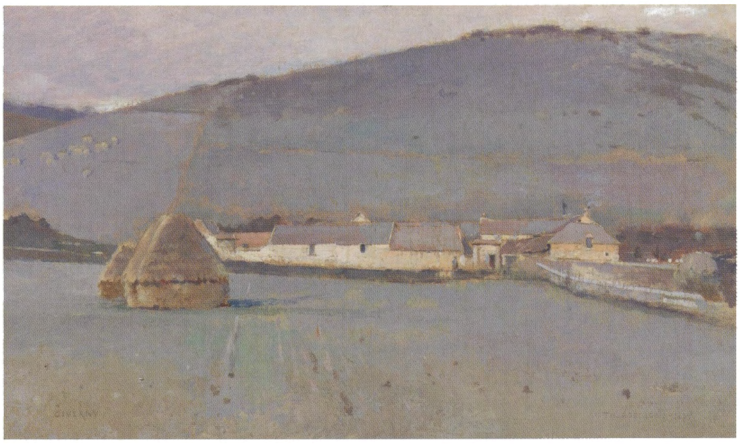


Fig. 3.76. Theodore Robinson, *Giverny*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 14 x 24 in. Private collection.

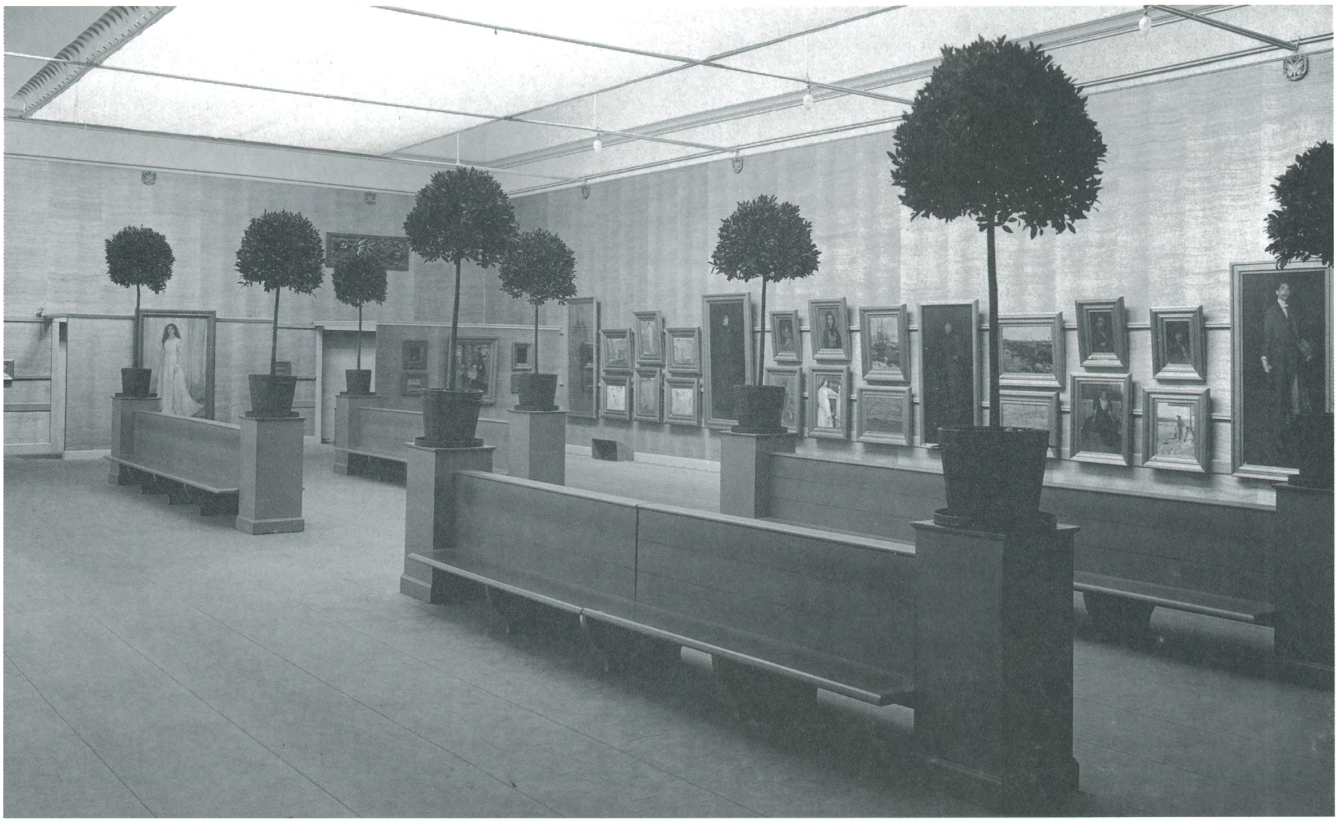
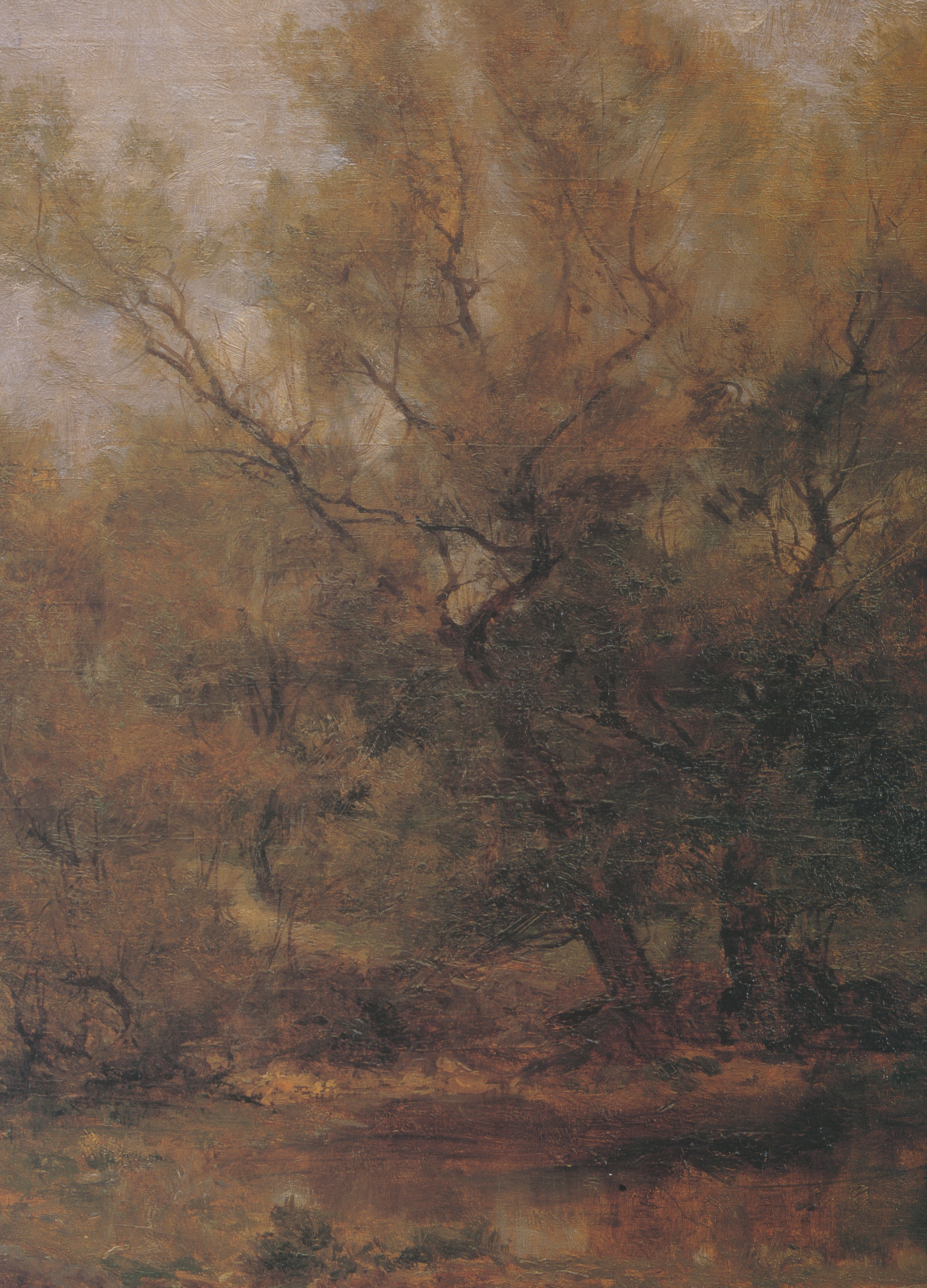


Fig. 3.77. Photograph of 1904 memorial exhibition of Whistler's work in Boston. Courtesy of the Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art Archives, Washington, DC.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Tonalist Revolution and the Origins of American Modernism: The Return of the Expatriates and the Founding of the Art Students League and the Society of American Artists

In 1867, Henry James wrote: "To be an American is an excellent preparation for culture. We have exquisite qualities as a race, and it seems to me that we are ahead of the European races in the fact that more than either of them we can deal freely with forms of civilization not our own, can pick and choose and assimilate and in short (aesthetically & etc.) claim our property wherever we find it. To have no national stamp has hitherto been a regret and a drawback, but I think it not unlikely that American writers may yet indicate that a vast intellectual fusion and synthesis of the various National tendencies of the world is the condition of more important achievements than any we have seen. We must of course have something of our own—something distinctive and homogeneous—and I take it that we shall find it in our moral consciousness, our unprecedented spiritual lightness and vigour. In this sense at least we shall have a national cachet.—I expect nothing great during your lifetime or mine perhaps; but my instincts quite agree with yours in looking to see something original and beautiful disengage itself from our ceaseless fermentation and turmoil."[1]

Within ten years of these words—and much sooner than James had expected—his prophetic hopes for an original American art, a hybrid of the best of past and present, had come to pass. John La Farge, who played a proselytizing role in the development of the Tonalist movement for almost fifty years, could look back in 1905 and confirm that America had indeed claimed its rightful place in producing a successor civilization to those that had come before: "[W]e, too, are rivals of all that has been done, and intend to rival all that shall be done, and we can then feel that the old cycle is closed, and that a new one has begun."[2] By 1900, America's finest artists, born between 1840 and 1865, had seen the future and had made it theirs.

The Search for an American Art, 1875–1895

The late 1870s, as has been discussed, was a period of enormous fecundity, of "ceaseless fermentation and turmoil" in the New York art world, as iconoclasts like George Inness, J. Frank Currier, and John Henry Twachtman began making their voices heard. The forces of change were rapidly reaching a critical mass and the pressure was building on the hidebound artists of the Hudson River School ensconced at the National Academy of Design. Inness, Alexander Wyant, Homer Dodge Martin, and La Farge, American radicals of the older generation, were now joined by a steady stream of "younger men" or "new men," as they were described in the art journals of the day, returning from Munich and Paris and the American art colonies in Brittany. Small, intimate landscapes by William Sartain, Hugh Bolton Jones, and Charles Melville Dewey replaced the sprawling views of the Hudson River men. In addition, younger radicals among the indigenous artists—Albert Pinkham Ryder, Ralph Albert Blakelock, and J. Francis Murphy—were about to make their presence felt in the early 1880s with their own inimitable landscape poetics. Charles Warren Eaton (*Winter Twilight,* 1886, fig. 4.1), Leonard Ochtman, and Ben Foster would also follow, absorbing the decorative aesthetic propagated by James McNeill Whistler's acolytes and domesticating it further in original ways. Whistler's reputation was growing exponentially in his homeland—Americans avidly followed the artist's 1878 libel trial against John Ruskin in the press—and soon Whistler's works would be regularly exhibited in America.

The cultural environment in New York had been maturing for more than a decade as New Yorkers grew increasingly interested in the fine and decorative arts. Writers like Henry Ward Beecher, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson had encouraged in their readers a deeper understanding of aesthetic issues—especially the literary, philosophical, and religious enthusiasms of New England—and a yearning to become conversant with, if not collect, fine art. This new hunger in the 1870s for things cultural was further developed by mid-decade when a range of new art publications arrived on the scene, including the *American Art Review, Art Amateur, The Art Interchange,* and *Art Journal.* Other transplanted New Englanders like New York's leading cultural maven William Cullen Bryant, Romantic poet and longtime editor of the *New York Evening Post,* and Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of Central Park, were, along with enlightened art patrons, instrumental in founding the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1870. All of them saw the development of museums, collections, and support for the arts as crucial to the social and spiritual betterment of the nation. Newspapers hired art critics

OPPOSITE: Hugh Bolton Jones. *Early Autumn, New England,* 1880 (detail of fig. 4.31).

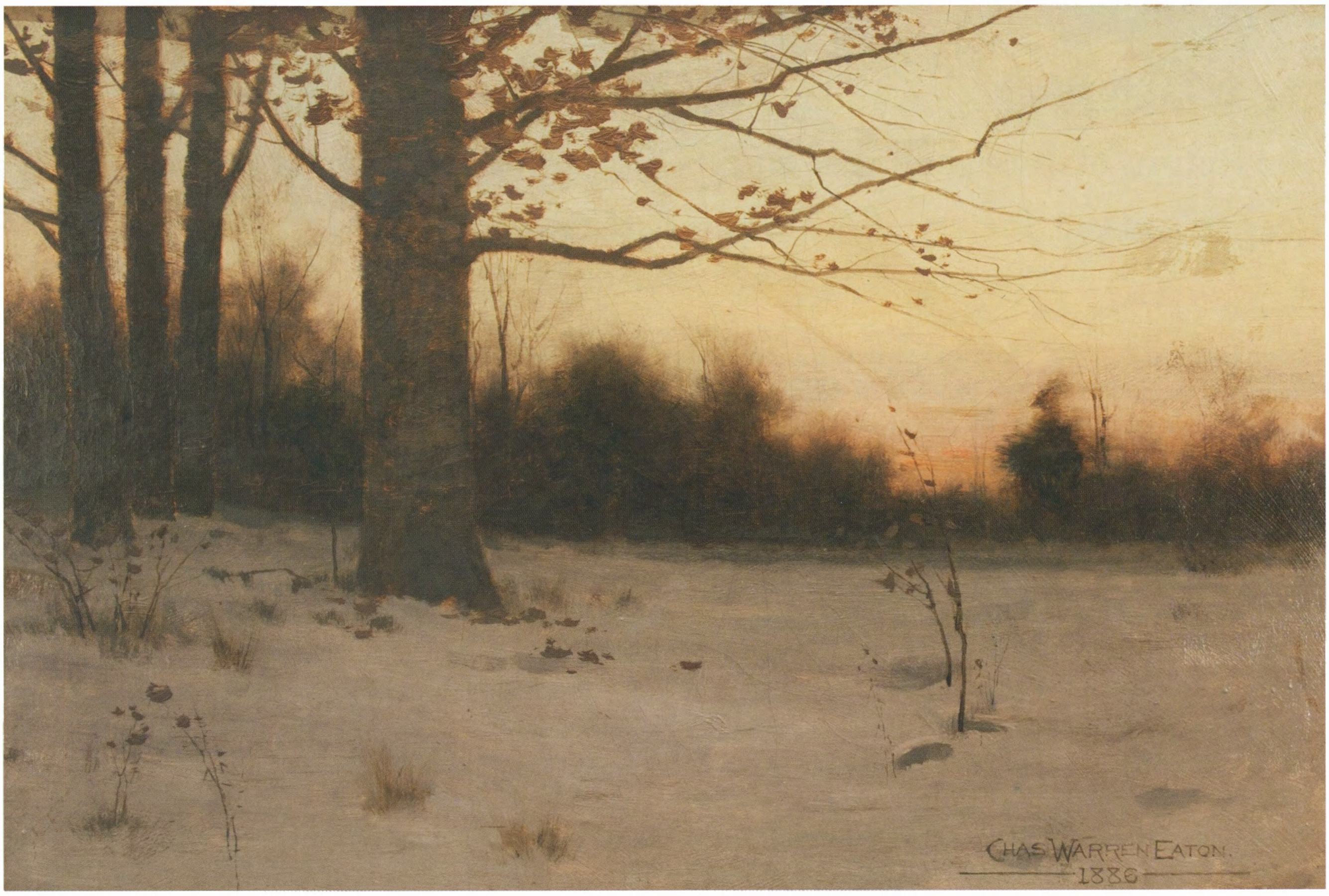


Fig. 4.1. Charles Warren Eaton, *Winter Twilight*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 10 x 15 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

to comment on developments locally and in Europe, and as noted in chapter 3, progressive art writers and critics around the Gilder circle, especially Charles de Kay of the *New York Times*, Mariana Van Rensselaer (who often wrote for *Scribner's Magazine*, published by de Kay's brother-in-law, William Gilder), and Clarence Cook of the *New York Tribune* (Cook, once the bane of Inness, spent time in Paris for the *Tribune* and on his return to New York became an advocate of advanced art) began supporting the new trends and championing the cause of a distinctly American art. Attention to the arts was further spurred by the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition. Tens of thousands of visitors flocked to see examples of both fine and decorative arts from home and abroad. A taste for European luxury goods and furniture spread beyond the wealthy to the middle class. Art became a subject of general discussion and Americans hungered to assert a national identity in art as they were doing in other arenas. Two institutions would dramatically mark this late-1870s modernist watershed: the formation of the Art Students League in 1875 and the establishment of the Society of American Artists in 1877—the former to teach the new doctrines and skills from Europe, the latter to display the radical new art and artists.

As has been seen, the emergence of J. Frank Currier and Henry Muhrman, and the harsh criticism directed at Winslow Homer caused an uproar among watercolorists. But it was in the arena of easel painting that the most fundamental and sustained break with the past was to occur. The critics, with knives sharpened, began picking over the National Academy of Design exhibitions of the early 1870s; they looked for something new and complained when they failed to find it; they wondered out loud and in print about what constituted a national art; and as more works of the European-trained Americans turned up in the exhibitions, they speculated about matters of finish, truth to nature, completeness, and what, if any progress America was making in art. Persistent American feelings of cultural inferiority were counteracted by a determination among artists and cultural critics to surpass the European competition, and then convince European-attuned collectors to buy American art. The National Academy annual exhibition of 1875, which demonstrated that the work of the younger artists from Europe had begun to reach a critical mass, marked a turning point in the ongoing debate. The Hudson River School artists came under withering criticism while the influence of the Munich and French schools began to be fervently debated by the art pundits, no longer on an abstract plane, but on a detailed level: Was one school better than another, did it matter if the subject of a picture was foreign or American, could the radical techniques and styles be accommodated to a national art, could

Europeanized Americans really find an individual expression—as James had put it, the essence of a "moral consciousness." A crucial question was, could the originality and independence of American art be defended and expanded. Originality—often in the guise of individuality—both artists and critics agreed, was now something to be esteemed as characterizing the American ethos. In many eyes, only Inness and Homer were recognized as true American originals. Inness was highly regarded for his rendition of the spiritualized domestic landscape, for his mystical demeanor, and his conviction that landscape expressed humanity's deepest emotions. Even within his lifetime, Inness would be seen as an American prophet and his landscapes as Transcendentalist visions. By the late 1870s Homer, who so captured the rugged individualism and vigor of the American spirit in many minds, was beset, especially in the watercolor medium, by the very forces Inness had unleashed and championed in his *Harper's* interview of 1878, when he called for an art of feeling. Increasingly, critics like Charles de Kay scrutinized Homer's watercolors in a negative light, finding the artist's traditional emphasis on narrative, his lack of academic finesse in his figures, and his ongoing failure to embrace the decorative, formal, and expressive tenets of the new art to be severe limitations for the leader of a national school.

By the early 1880s the old landscape school was vanquished, and as the decade proceeded a new landscape style took its place: the Tonalist landscape, which was intimate, domestic, and expressive of James's "spiritual lightness," precisely those native values—both individual and collective—that characterized a homogeneous American vision. The rise of the Tonalist landscape put relentless pressure on the National Academy of Design for almost two decades—as noted by Eliot Clark in his official history of the institution—until the academy, too, bowed to the relentless gospel of the new art. "The dominant trend was opposed to meticulous finish and the elaboration of detail; the creative endeavor was to achieve the relation of the part to the whole by means of coordinated tonal values. Whereas their predecessors delineated each component part of the composition with naturalistic accuracy, the painters of the tonal movement emphasized the unity of visual impression."[3] Between 1878 and 1900 the academy was under constant pressure to adapt to changing times, or as the historian and artist Samuel Isham commented in 1905: "The old landscape school had at bottom appealed to a very trivial sentiment, the delight which the average man takes in the minute and literal reproduction of familiar objects. The better men had by their own personal feeling for nature or beauty lifted themselves to a higher plane, but by just so much had they alienated their patrons until, in the case of men like Inness and Homer Dodge Martin, their pictures were unsalable not only in spite, but because of their merits . . . The average of workmanship at the academy exhibitions in the seventies was lamentably low, not worse than it had been before, but seeming so because it was contrasted with the clever, well-executed canvases in all the dealers' galleries."[4]

To make matters worse for the National Academy, as Isham noted, the business of art was also changing. In the 1870s, art dealers were taking the place of the old patrons who had supported the likes of Inness and the Hudson River painters in the 1850s and 1860s, and more to the point, the dealers were catering to the new taste for Tonalist landscapes. Boston dealers had long supplied French Barbizon landscapes and had sold the paintings of Inness and La Farge; in 1878 La Farge had a very successful sale of his small Newport landscapes and still lifes at Boston's Doll & Richards. By the early 1880s Doll & Richards was doing a brisk business in Tonalists like J. Francis Murphy (*Gloaming*, 1882, fig. 4.2) and Charles Melville Dewey. In the late 1870s, the New York dealer Cottier & Co. had begun importing the works of French Barbizon artists, Corot, Millet, and Daubigny, along with a range of academic and genre work by French artists. Cottier also began exhibiting a limited range of American painters; Albert Pinkham Ryder, Charles Melville Dewey, and William Gedney Bunce being the most prominent, possibly because Ryder, Bunce, and Dewey

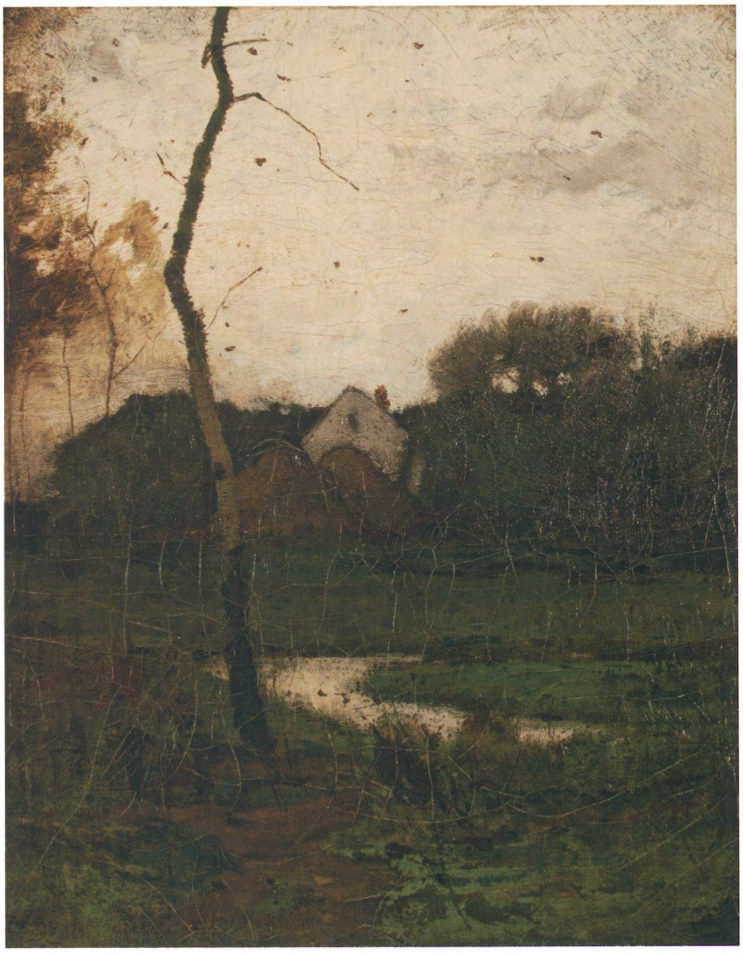


Fig. 4.2. J. Francis Murphy, *Gloaming*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 11 x 9 in. Private collection.

displayed a European flair and sophistication equal to Cottier's European artists.

Nevertheless, sophisticated tastes could cut in unintended ways, and from the 1860s on, wealthy new collectors were developing a hunger for European goods that retained a patina of Old World cachet. This was particularly the case in genre paintings. Many of the returning American artists, even those who specialized in figurative genre work, were finding to their chagrin that their hard-won skills did not necessarily redound to their benefit among their putative American patrons: this new breed of collector was only interested in genre pictures by European painters—the old-line Parisian artists who offered brand-name recognition and confirmed investment potential. New York millionaire collectors like Samuel P. Avery, who advised William H. Vanderbilt, were more interested in amassing old masters and French academic figurative art, creating collections that would find a place in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Thus, competition for the best hanging positions at the existing exhibition venues—in particular, for those at the National Academy and the American Watercolor Society—where an artist could be seen, reviewed, recommended, and have pictures sold, became fiercer than ever. With the development of galleries handling American art proceeding at a painfully slow pace (the first major gallery specializing in American landscapes, Macbeth Gallery, did not open until 1892), artists took selling matters into their own hands. In effect, the American artists, bowing to market realities, developed new institutions to sell their art while perfecting a homegrown product that rivaled if not surpassed the European imports: the Tonalist landscape. Between 1880 and 1900, the Tonalists methodically and diligently exploited their competitive advantage. Key to the movement's success was a very typical and practical American solution—to create and build two institutions conducive to the needs of the artist and the market.

Founding of the Art Students League, 1875

The first institutional break with the established National Academy of Design was hardly a revolutionary act at its inception, although in retrospect it turned out to be one of the most far-reaching radical changes in American art history. By 1875 the National Academy School had long been the most important fine arts school in New York (The Cooper Union had a more practical, vocational bent) for young students interested in serious academic instruction. European training was an expensive and distant option. The National Academy School offered free instruction and was based primarily on European atelier models. By the summer of 1875 the finances of the National Academy were in temporary disarray and for various reasons the fall classes of the school were canceled. The students, some two hundred, took it on themselves to organize into a society, choose a board of control, and hire their previous National Academy instructor, Lemuel Wilmarth, to teach classes at a new location. This was more a practical act of desperation than a revolt against the existing system of instruction; but the offshoot, the creation of the Art Students League, would have wider implications of a radical bent. Within a few short years the league was a thriving school of art, offering the most diverse and advanced training of any school in America. Perhaps the most important precedent set by the league was its manner of incorporation: it was voluntary, self-serving, self-governing, and privately funded; it was profoundly democratic and a model for professional societies formed to address the needs, in this case, of a diverse student membership of budding professional artists.

The breakaway league would form the template for the Society of American Artists in 1877, and the Society of Painters in Pastel and the New York Water Color Club in the next decade. According to Charles de Kay of the *New York Times*, who, along with his sister Helena de Kay Gilder (also a founder of the league), was one of the main instigators of the Society of American Artists, the student rebellion against the academy foreshadowed or inspired the professional artists' determination to found the society two years later. In his critique of the academy's discriminatory policy against the younger foreign-trained artists, de Kay warned in 1877: "They should have taken warning from the significant desertion of the art students, who last year [actually 1875] seceded from their schools and opened a student's league."[5] Two weeks later, de Kay described the students' break with the academy in even more dramatic terms. "The Students' Art League, which now comprises 200 members and employs daily four living models, split off from the academy because of continued neglect of reasonable demands and repeated breaking of pledges."[6] De Kay was probably recalling the more fevered art-world politics of the summer of 1877, but clearly the success of the league inspired plans for the formation of the society, the two events merging in many minds as a common revolt against the academy, to the point that within a matter of years the league was virtually acting as the society's art school: all the early instructors were members of the society.

Once the students, professional artists, and teachers of the league were in control of their collective fate—and in a matter of a few years the membership had greatly expanded and long-term facilities had been secured—they could easily and relatively quickly adapt to the changing artistic climate, tastes, and practical necessities of the profession. And change they did. With the Art Students League established as a teaching institution, youthful enthusiasm took over and the membership began to look upon itself as a league of "radicals," "rebels," or "ungrateful students," as described by disgruntled members

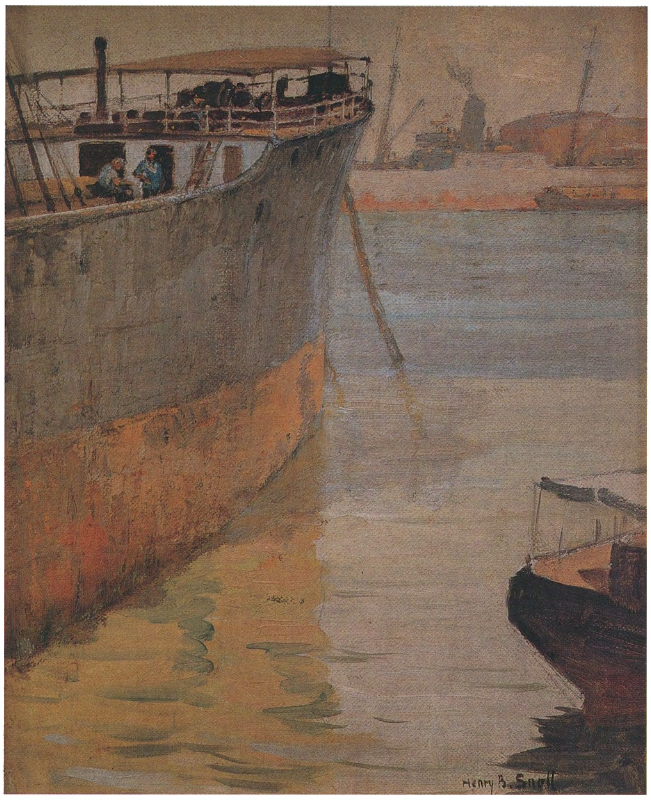


Fig. 4.3. Henry Snell, *Under the Bow, Venice*, c. 1900. Oil on board, 10 x 8 in. Private collection.

of the National Academy,[7] a stance encouraged by critics like de Kay. But the true revolution that took place had less to do with attitude and much to do with teachers and teaching methods. Even the league's first instructor, Wilmarth, who had taught at the National Academy and would soon return once the academy board had put the school on a sounder financial footing, was trained in Munich and taught and painted with a distinct Munich bravura and expressive rhythmic paint handling. Walter Shirlaw, who replaced Wilmarth in 1878, was another Munich man and, more crucially, a founding member and first president of the Society of American Artists, as well as a vehement antagonist of the academy; he resigned in protest from the academy in 1879, claiming the older institution was snubbing the younger members of the profession—presumably his students at the league, among others.[8] Within a matter of a few years, the league used the society as a prime recruiting ground for instructors. By the early 1880s such progressive luminaries of the Society of American Artists as William Merritt Chase, William Sartain, Thomas Dewing, and J. Alden Weir were teaching at the league. One of the great art world contretemps of the early 1880s concerned the society's 1884 exhibition in which the critics condemned Chase for packing the exhibition with his protégés from the Art Students League. The early reliance by the league on instructors with a Munich background was soon ameliorated by the hiring of teachers with French training, in microcosm suggesting the evolutionary merging of the various tendencies of the European tradition—writ large in the New York art world—into a hybrid and adaptable American style. It was precisely this homogenization of the Munich, Paris, and Whistlerian styles, modified by American Transcendental Romanticism, that characterized the direction of the society in the decade of the 1880s and subsequently the academy—the broad confluence that undergirded the Tonalist landscape movement.

What set the league apart from the European atelier model was a certain level of freedom of approach and informality, which stressed craftsmanship and competency over ideological or rigid stylistic conformity. Students could choose their teachers and the emphasis of their art education to suit their individual needs and proclivities. Senior students, the long-standing members, ran the institution, a practice that has continued to this day. This relatively democratic and adaptable system, which allowed market forces to sway the direction of the young, quickly produced some of the greatest figures in the indigenous Tonalist movement, landscape artists like Leonard Ochtman, Henry Snell (*Under the Bow, Venice,* c. 1900, fig. 4.3), and Charles Warren Eaton—all important exhibitors at the Society of American Artists.

By the time Charles Warren Eaton arrived in New York in 1880 as an impecunious art student from Albany and began to take classes at the league, it was already a hotbed of society influence, offering the most progressive art instruction in America. Eaton struggled financially, holding a full-time job at a dry goods store while attending league classes when he had the time and energy. He had tried out the free academy school but was desperate for instruction from the leading lights of the day. In letters he wrote to fellow Albany artist and friend Leonard Ochtman, he enumerated the critical role the league played in the formation and improvement of his style and technique. In 1881 he wrote of an exhibition at the Art Students League that included J. Frank Currier and Frank Duveneck, "all strong and good and very instructive," and, "an excellent Swain Gifford." These exhibitions, in which instructors showed their most progressive work, were easily accessible to eager and impressionable league students, and most likely played an important role in disseminating the central tenets of the Aesthetic movement to the rising generation of Americans. Eaton studied life drawing with J. Carroll Beckwith (fig. 4.4), another early member of the society, and then worked in Thomas Dewing's composition class (fig. 4.5); Dewing was yet another transplanted New Englander, a celebrated instructor at the society and champion of the Aesthetic movement, and a member of the Gilder circle. So desperate was Eaton to absorb all the league had to offer that he turned down a suggestion from Ochtman to start their own art school in Albany: "...I would like very much to continue my studies at the League for I know how badly I need them."[9] A visit in 1882 by none other

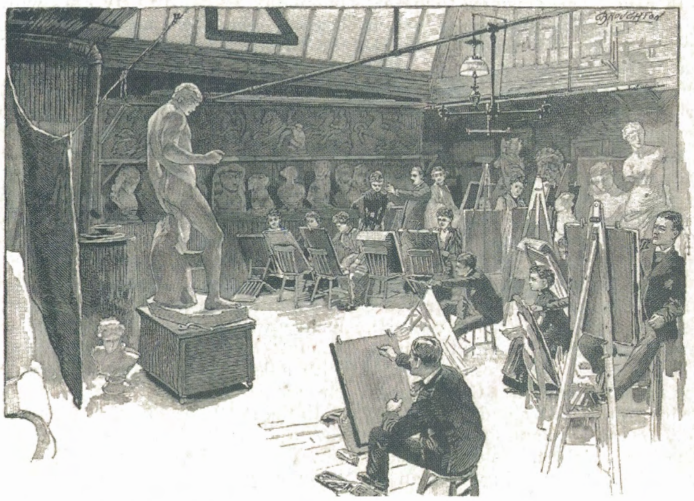


Fig. 4.4. The concours antique class at the Art Students League, J. Carroll Beckwith, instructor, illustrated by Charles Broughton, *Harper's Magazine*, 1891. Picture Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

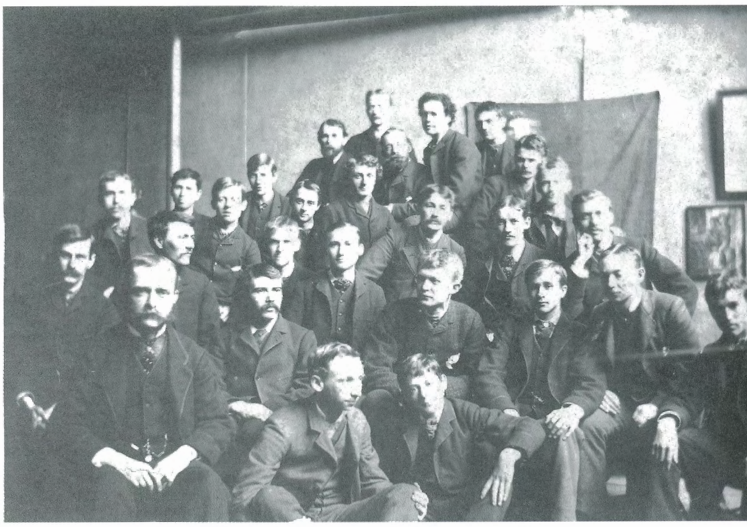


Fig. 4.5. Thomas Dewing's composition class at the Art Students League, 1883. The artist Charles Warren Eaton (with goatee) is to the immediate left of the topmost figure. Peter A. Juley & Son Collection, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

than George Inness to Dewing's composition class, in which Eaton was signaled out for praise and encouragement, proved a high point in Eaton's early league training. Eaton proceeded with astonishing speed from part-time student at the league to success at the academy and then the society, where his mentor Dewing may have eased him past the bruising selection process in 1884, beginning a run of acceptances during the next twenty years that was second only to Chase. What the league did for Eaton, it did for many native landscape painters who, for whatever reason, did not or could not afford to study abroad: it gave them the technical tools and stylistic sophistication to raise their homespun enthusiasm for the American landscape to the highest levels of craftsmanship and artistry. Just as the society proved to be a ready recruiting ground for instructors at the league, the league soon proved to be a long-term talent pool for the annual exhibitions of the society.

Formation and Early Development of the Society of American Artists, 1877–1900

In the summer of 1877, when plans were first broached for the formation of the Society of American Artists, the New York art world was simmering with heated debate and inner-circle politicking. The academicians at the National Academy of Design had voted themselves the right to eight feet on the line in future exhibitions and the younger progressive artists were incensed. Ironically, this offensive move had been precipitated three years earlier by none other than John La Farge. The long-suffering La Farge, a New Yorker by birth who found the art climate of Boston and Newport more propitious to creativity and sales, was plagued by rejection in his hometown, especially at the National Academy where he had been a full member since 1869. In 1874 two of his paintings were not placed by the academy's Hanging Committee. Additionally, a submission by Whistler that season had been poorly hung. La Farge protested to his fellow academicians that as a member of the academy he had a right to be exhibited; he further asserted in a resolution: "That the Academy of Design in its exhibitions does not propose to exercise judicial functions and to decide between different schools and methods of Art, but that it believes the interests of Art to be best aided by the exhibition of all that has obtained sanction in the artistic community."[10] Ignoring La Farge's motion, the following year, 1875, the academy again snubbed La Farge and a number of his and William Morris Hunt's women pupils, including Helena de Kay Gilder, along with a host of young painters with foreign credentials. Helena de Kay Gilder, sister of the *New York Times* art critic, Charles de Kay, and married to the influential editor of *Scribners' Magazine* (and later *The Century Magazine*), William Gilder, teamed up with her teacher, La Farge, to create a small exhibition at the commercial gallery of Cottier & Co. The four formed the core of the Gilder circle, which, with the additions of the *New York Tribune* critic Clarence Cook, and progressive artists Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Francis Lathrop, and Walter Shirlaw, became the founding cabal of the Society of American Artists two years later. The exhibition at Cottier & Co. in 1875 proved to be a stalking horse for the creation of the society, for almost three decades a liberalizing counterweight to the established National Academy. The ultimate triumph of the Gilder circle was, in effect, the triumph of Boston's cultural elite over old New York; the Gilder circle brought to bear a critical mass of talent and progressive energy in support of the New England bred-in-the-bone Transcendental Romantic aesthetic, which gradually wore down and replaced the reactionary snobbish stalwarts,

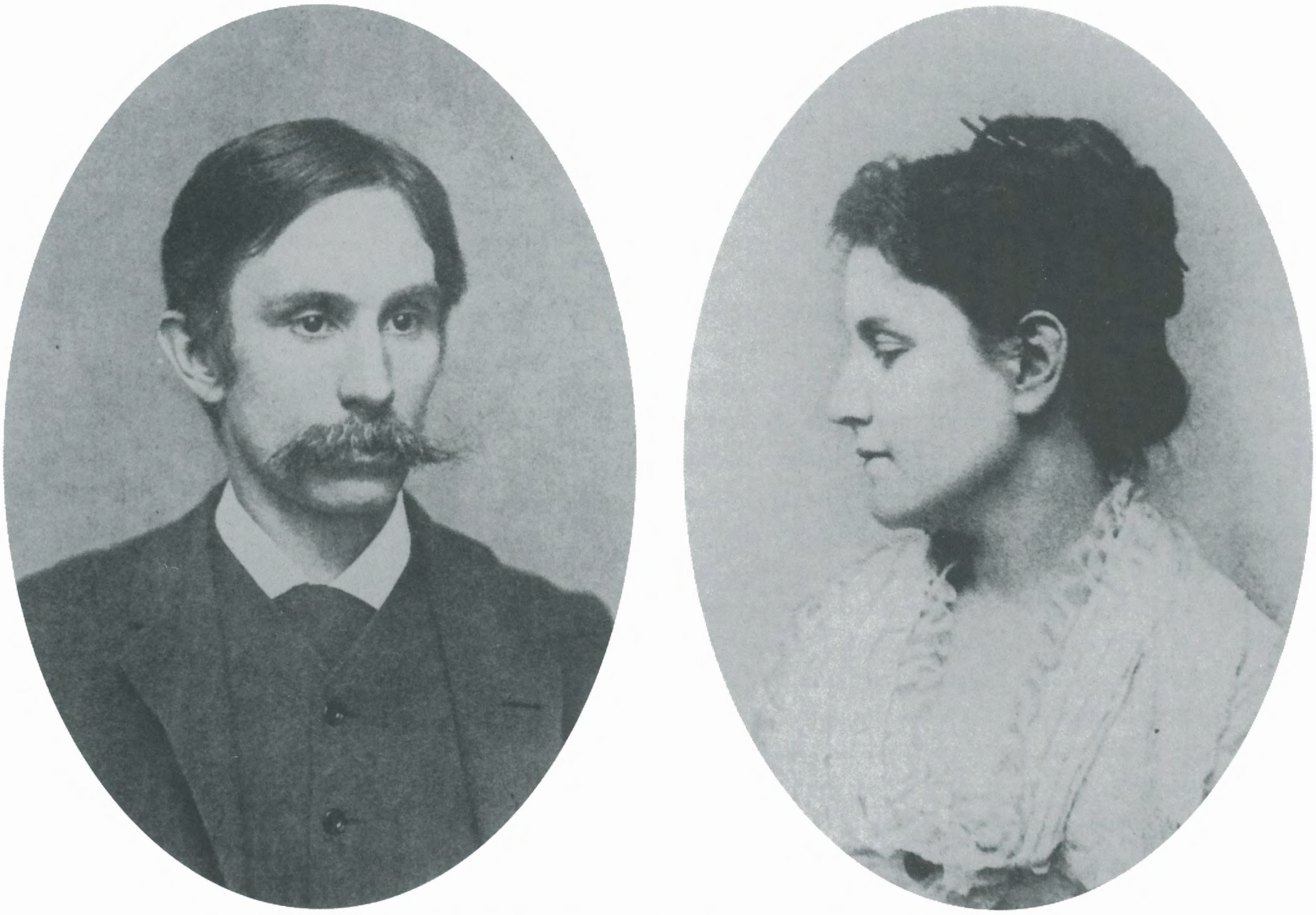


Fig. 4.6. Undated photographs of Richard Watson Gilder and Helena de Kay Gilder.

beholden to European fashion, who had ruled the New York art world for decades. Much of what we think of as modernism in American art was generated by the artists, writers, poets, and thinkers associated with the Gilders. As Henry Ward Beecher had disseminated liberal ideas about religion, art, and George Inness to an earlier generation, as William Cullen Bryant promoted literary nationalism, so the Gilder circle, Cook, and de Kay spread the art for art's sake gospel near and far in hopes of creating a distinctly American art.

The Gilder coterie would hold sway in the progressive cultural milieu of New York—if not national art circles—for close to thirty years, until the death of Richard Watson Gilder in 1909. Gilder (fig. 4.6) was a highly respected poet and dynamic editor in chief, first of *Scribner's Monthly* and then *The Century Magazine*. In that role, he promoted and encouraged the Society of American Artists and the artists connected with it. His wife, Helena de Kay Gilder, granddaughter of the Knickerbocker poet Joseph Rodman Drake, was a talented artist who had studied with Hunt and La Farge at Newport and had helped found the Art Students League, and two years later, the Society of American Artists. Although Gilder was originally from New Jersey, his poetic sensibilities were refined through close readings of New Englanders Emerson, Thoreau, and John Greenleaf Whittier; through his wife's family, the de Kays, the Gilders were associated with Boston's Transcendentalist intelligentsia, Emerson being the foremost, but also including William and Henry James, known from Helena's childhood growing up in Newport, as well as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and countless others. In the 1880s the Gilders bought a country retreat in Marion, Massachusetts, at the head of Buzzards Bay, where they entertained artists and writers, and developed a longstanding friendship with President Grover Cleveland and his wife. Friendship with the Clevelands resulted in Helena's brother, Charles de Kay, gaining an appointment as consul general in Berlin in 1894. The Gilders' Friday night soirées at Helena's intimate Stanford White–designed studio on West Fifteenth Street become a New York institution. When the writer and editor William Dean Howells moved from Boston to New York in the late 1880s, he found the Gilders and their artistic set a convivial outpost of his beloved literary world in Boston and Cambridge, which he had abandoned with much trepidation. The finest artists, writers, and art patrons of the day were drawn into their circle. Wrote the artist Will Low, "To the hospitable welcome of this modest dwelling, every one [*sic*] who came to New York in those days, bearing a passport of intellectual worth, appeared to find his way."[11] Walt Whitman said of the Gilders,"You must never forget this of the Gilders, that at a time when most everyone else in their set threw me down they were nobly and unhesitatingly hospitable. The Gilders were without pride and without shame ... I was such an innocent and the Gilders took me in."[12] Among the Tonalist artists of a New England romantic and Transcendentalist bent drawn to the Gilder Circle were La Farge, Thomas Dewing and his wife, Maria Oakley, a painter of exquisite Tonalist floral still lifes, Robert Swain Gifford, Albert Pinkham Ryder, J. Alden Weir, and Abbott Thayer, a figurative painter who produced some of the finest and most abstract Tonalist landscapes of his generation (*Mount Monadnock*, c. 1900, fig 4.7). As a member of the Century Club, Gilder associated with such artistic luminaries as John La Farge, Homer Dodge Martin, and Winslow Homer. Gilder's brother-in-law, Charles de Kay, an art critic for the *New York Times* beginning in 1877, remained the single most progressive voice in support of the Tonalist movement for more than thirty years. After graduating from Yale University in 1868, de Kay spent two years in Europe with his sister (Mrs. Bronson) and her artistic circles in Paris and Venice, where he came to know Robert Browning, Henry James, and Whistler—becoming a passionate supporter of the "master" and a convert to the Aesthetic movement. A respected poet and novelist in his own right, de Kay championed the nationalist cause in American art unflaggingly: he founded the Authors Club in 1882, the National Sculpture Society in 1892, and, in 1899, with Tonalist art collector William T. Evans, the National Arts Club, an organization dedicated to the promotion of American art at home and abroad. If one non-artist can be said to be central to the history of Tonalism in America, it is Charles de Kay (fig. 4.8).

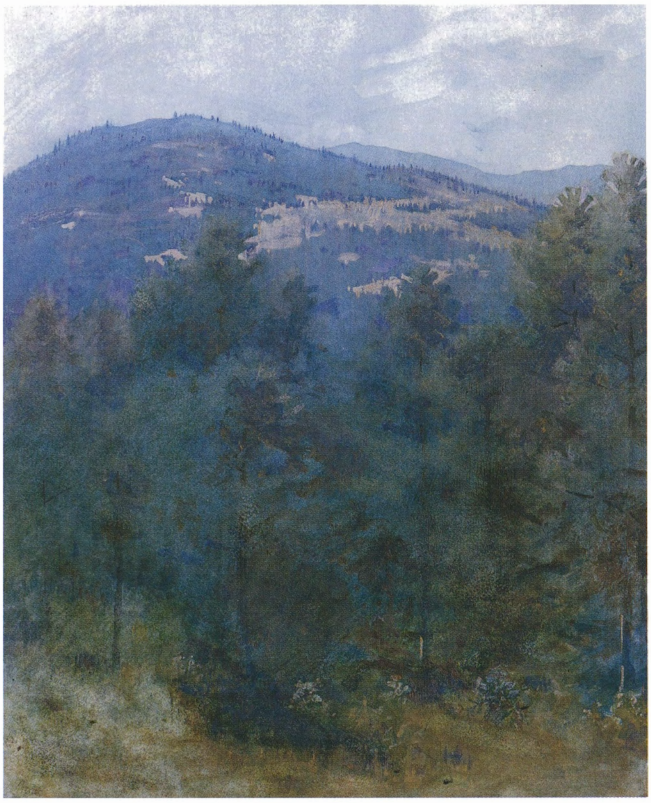


Fig. 4.7. Abbott Thayer, *Mount Monadnock*, c. 1887. Watercolor, 16⅝ x 13⅝ in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

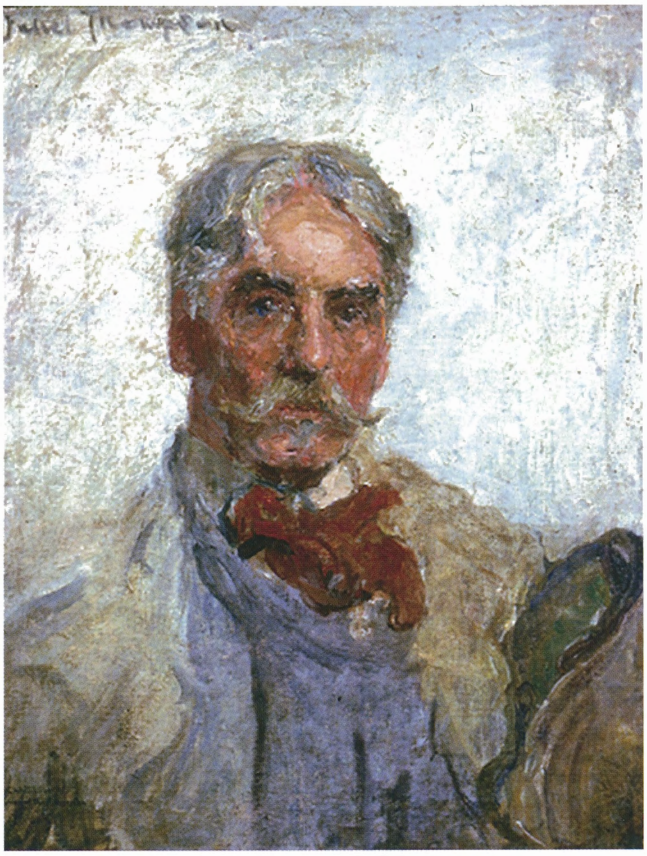


Fig. 4.8. Juliet Thompson, *Charles de Kay*, 1940. Oil on canvas, 27 x 22 in. National Arts Club, New York. Gift of Mrs. Charles de Kay.

John La Farge, the guiding spirit behind the radicals, clearly wanted the Cottier & Co. exhibition to reflect a decorative aesthetic—a style that ran contrary to the Hudson River landscapes in the academy—and so ruled out portraits and landscapes. The exhibitors were primarily students of Hunt and La Farge, including Thayer and Ryder (Ryder would become a close friend of Cottier and create decorative work for the firm Cottier established in 1869 to produce aesthetic furnishings). Many of the exhibitors were women, including Helena de Kay Gilder and Maria Oakley, a close friend of Helena de Kay Gilder who was steeped in the New England literary tradition of Emerson and Thoreau. She married the Tonalist painter Thomas Dewing and they became a power art couple who would add to the prestige and growing influence of the Gilder circle in New York and the summer artists colony of Cornish, New Hampshire. Cottier & Co., which exhibited mostly European works, especially Barbizon landscapes by Camille Corot, Adolphe Monticelli, and Narcisse Diaz, was a kind of satellite of Boston's advanced taste in dowdy New York. The gallery was certainly a congenial choice for Boston-oriented artists like La Farge, Hunt, Ryder, and Hunt's Boston students (Cottier also exhibited the work of Connecticut-born William Gedney Bunce). The critics, especially from Boston, responded positively to the exhibited decorative and genre works: the *Boston Sunday Evening Gazette* referred to the exhibitors as a "new-school" who "represent one of the most important art movements of the day."[13] William Gilder, with the support of Clarence Cook at the *New York Tribune*, made sure that the Cottier & Co. show received favorable recognition in the press, so much so that the academy agreed to provide better hanging space for the young, foreign-trained artists in 1876.

The nation's one-hundredth anniversary year of 1876 passed without much incident, and the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition provided little evidence of the new influences in American art flowing in from Europe. The year 1877 proved to be another matter. Two progressive members of the National Academy Hanging Committee, belatedly taking La Farge's 1874 plea for artistic diversity to heart, placed a number of European-trained nonmembers in prominent positions on the line, among them Frank Duveneck, Walter Shirlaw, Abbott Thayer, and Arthur Quartley. High-profile future members of the society, such as William Merritt Chase, J. Alden Weir, and William Sartain also received good hangings. The critics, by and large, were favorably impressed by the generous showing of the Munich- and Paris-trained artists. Duveneck and Chase in particular proved controversial with their genre paintings full of dazzle and daring, and unusual—to some critics, downright ugly—subject matter. Critics noted the generational change in progress and the crux of the matter was spelled out by a writer in the *New York World*: "All men who care for art at all, and who think about it at all divide roughly into two classes. Consciously or unconsciously they care for what we call imitation (in its narrower and conventional sense) or for what we call ideality, for logic or for feeling, for truth (also in its narrower sense) or for beauty, for reason or for poetry, for exactness or for freedom, for reproduction or for production, for the tangible thing or for the suggestive thing, for representation or for illusion."[14] Here encapsulated were the central aesthetic tenets of the Tonalist movement in the making.

The older members of the academy, realists in the Hudson River tradition, reacted in dismay and alarm that the best hanging space in their sacrosanct precincts should be given over to the purveyors of broadly brushed, sketchy, and decorative works. In fact, many of the most advanced works by the European-trained artists had been skied, and even the prominently displayed works of Duveneck and Chase were quite finished from a conservative standpoint, even anecdotal, compared to what they would contribute to society exhibitions in the ensuing years. The stalwarts at the academy sprang into action and not only managed to get a new "eight-foot rule" passed, giving academy members the right to two paintings and eight feet of hanging space on the line in the annual exhibitions, but blatantly blackballed for academy membership some of the rising young stars among the foreign-trained Americans. In effect, the academy had taken action on La Farge's 1874 protest, on the one hand confirming exhibition privileges for academicians, but—hoisting La Farge and his cohorts by their own petard—making sure that any new members conformed to the anti-modernist line. Adding insult to injury, the old guard took control of the hanging committee to enforce compliance. (figs. 4.9 and 4.10)

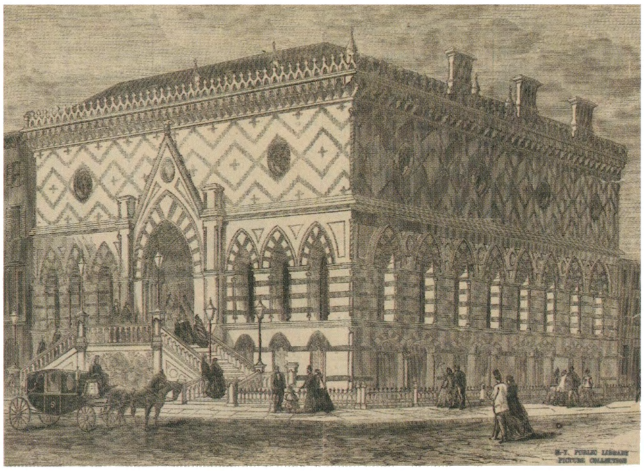

N.-Y. PUBLIC LIBRARY PICTURE COLLECTION

Fig. 4.9. View of the National Academy of Design, from *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*, 1865: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

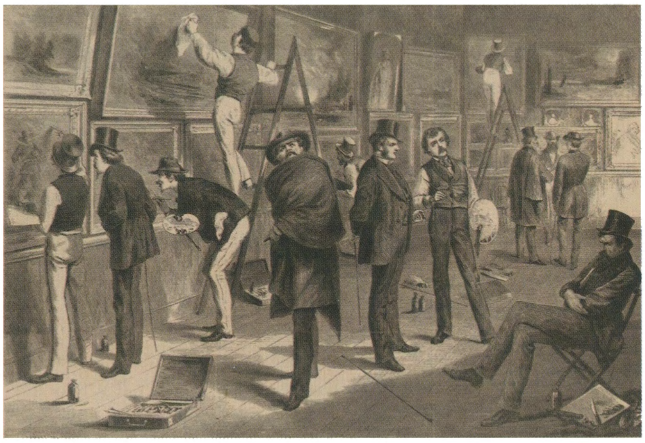


Fig. 4.10. *Varnishing Day at the New York National Academy of Design*, illustration by Charles Stanley Reinhart for *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*, 1865: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

The Gilder circle press machine quickly parried. Clarence Cook, in the *New York Tribune,* called the academy's behavior "an act of contempt,"[15] especially the failure of the progressive New England landscapist Robert Swain Gifford to gain membership. (Cook had been an antagonist of Inness and supporter of the Pre-Raphaelites, but a stint as Paris correspondent for the *Tribune* had converted him to a more progressive viewpoint.) Charles de Kay was scathing in his remarks about the academy, hinting darkly that if it did not change its methods it would fall into desuetude. "The only revenge will be a passive one; it will be generally understood that outsiders have no chance at the exhibitions of the Academy of Design, interest in those exhibitions will cease, and people will simply stay away."[16] De Kay, as a Gilder circle insider, clearly knew what La Farge and his sister, Helena de Kay Gilder, and brother-in-law had in mind, and subtly alluded to the options open to the progressive artists: "...that young painters must hereafter look elsewhere for encouragement and appreciation... Let them band together and exhibit elsewhere, until the Academicians have come to their senses and are ready to manage the Academy in the interest of the art-loving public... Unless they fill the exhibitions with the freshest, most original, and best-painted canvases to be procured from American artists here or abroad, young or old, Academicians or not, they will see their prestige disappear."[17] Other New York critics followed suit, criticizing the academy for a shortsighted business mentality, while two weeks later de Kay warned: "Unless the liberal minority goes to work with energy and wins over enough votes to control next year's policy, a rival institution will be started, and, quite possibly, take from the Academy not only the public patronage, but some of the most attractive artists as well."[18] This, as de Kay well knew, was no idle threat.

On the night of June 1, 1877, William and Helena de Kay Gilder welcomed to their New York home other confederates of the Gilder Circle, the artists Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Walter Shirlaw (first president and instructor at the league), Wyatt Eaton, and art critic Clarence Cook (asked by Gilder to witness the proceedings). It was resolved at the meeting "[t]hat an association be formed by those present, with the object of advancing the interests of Art in America, the same to be entitled 'The American Art Association.'"[19] (In early 1878 the name was changed to the Society of American Artists.) The founders were not ready to announce their new organization immediately and they carefully rounded up supporters and additional recruits from the liberal members of the National Academy of Design and artists in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and overseas. Among the artists were those who would feature prominently in the Tonalist movement—Robert Swain Gifford, John La Farge, George Inness, Louis Tiffany, Homer Dodge Martin, Alexander Wyant, and from abroad, Frederick Bridgman and John Singer Sargent—and the American Impressionists Theodore Robinson and Mary Cassatt. Meanwhile, Clarence Cook and Charles de Kay continued a guerilla war of outrage against the academy in the press, suggesting the need for an alternative to the academy, or even a new academy, advancing the idea that the young artists avoid the academy or strike out on their own. De Kay prophesied the emergence of a new national school, the result, "like everything else that is real, of hard and self-sacrificing work by men of humble aspirations."[20] He wrote about the importance of cross-fertilization from European sources and inveighed against the self-serving attitude of the old guard at the academy. "It demonstrates with the horrible frankness of events that the public demanded a new regime, new men, new ideas... The pubic demands fair play for women [certainly a nod to his sister and her friend Maria Oakley] as well as men, for the youngest as well as the oldest, and if the Academy of Design can not secure it, some other establishment will."[21]

A few months later on October 30, de Kay announced the formation of the Society of American Artists in the *New York Times*, going to some lengths to portray the break with the academy, not as an embittered or unbridgeable rejection of the academy's reactionary policies but as a new start for American art. He called the formation of the society a dignified protest rather than the creation of a business rival. "The object of the association is to encourage art in general, not hurt the academy—to lend a helping hand to the younger men, not offend the veterans of the guild."[22] The members of the society had no desire to burn bridges, especially since many were still members of the academy and fully intended to continue exhibiting at the academy in the future (only three society members did not exhibit at the academy in 1878), even if, in some cases, with more conventional offerings. Members of both groups, like Louis Comfort Tiffany and Robert Swain Gifford, were committed to a conciliatory policy toward the academy. The decision by the society to hold its 1878 exhibition before that of the academy, so as not to suggest a direct rivalry, is also an indication that the "irreconcilables" among the society members bowed to the more moderate views of the majority.[23] Although the rivalry between the two institutions would heat up over the years and the critics—de Kay in particular delighted in using the society exhibitions as a stick to beat the academy—would unmercifully pummel the academy, using the enlightened and masterful exhibitions of the society to highlight the retrograde work of the academy, the bottom line remained firmly in place: artists needed and employed both venues to publicize and sell their work. The competition between the two would prove beneficial for all concerned. Belatedly, the academy would adopt many of the progressive features of the society, while many of the finest artists, joining the bandwagon for the burgeoning market in Tonalist landscapes, would happily exhibit at both annual shows until the groups merged in 1906.

The formation of the society—the excitement, hope, and new possibilities it represented for many progressive artists at home or abroad—breathed fresh air into the American art world of late 1877–78. Letters and articles (many in *Scribner's Magazine*, presumably at the behest of Gilder) of the time spoke of widespread relief and an electric atmosphere at the prospect of a new exhibiting group. The American artists in

Paris and Munich, who always felt excluded from American exhibitions, regained hope, especially because the society allowed them the extraordinary dispensation of judging among themselves which of their works were to be exhibited in New York. It may be that many expatriates, reluctant to return to an American art world stuck in the old-fashioned Dusseldorf-Ruskinian mode enforced by the academy, were lured back at the possibility of a more propitious and liberal mood in New York. When the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens went back to Paris in July 1877 to announce the creation of the society and solicit contributions, expatriate painters like Will Low immediately took heart at what awaited in America. "He [Saint-Gaudens] held out to the homegower [*sic*] the prospect of finding kindred spirits who would welcome him to the ranks, and drew a cheering horoscope of the future."[24] Power in the art community was shifting to the Society of American Artists and the Art Students League and the enlightened critics and patrons under the sway of the Gilder circle. Where New York had appeared a cultural desert for artists who had known the sophisticated pleasures of Europe, by 1878 a balmy new atmosphere for art, reforming and liberal, was on the rise and centered on the society. It seems no coincidence that the same year the society opened its first exhibition, George Inness issued his artistic manifesto of 1878, echoing many of the aesthetic principles on which the society was based, principles that Charles de Kay, in turn, would also espouse in 1878 and voice repeatedly in his reviews over the next two decades. Inness called for an art that was fundamentally expressive as opposed to purely representational, an art that would awaken feeling: "[T]he true beauty of the work consists in the beauty of the sentiment or emotion which it inspires. Its real greatness consists in the quality and the force of this emotion. Details in the picture must be elaborated only enough fully to reproduce the impression that the artist wishes to reproduce."[25] In a similar vein, Whistler, rebelling against narrative Victorian shibboleths, would defend his Nocturnes in his 1878 trial against Ruskin: art was about abstract aspirations, soothing harmonies, and suggestiveness—not a storytelling portrait of reality.

The first exhibition of the Society of American Artists in 1878 was held at the Kurtz Gallery, a commercial gallery that lacked the extensive hanging space available at the academy. Nevertheless, the exhibition contained a remarkable array of talent that augured well for the future of American art. Out of 124 works exhibited, forty-five were landscapes; and of the original twenty-two members (whose average age was thirty-four)—eleven were landscape artists (two were sculptors: Saint-Gaudens and Olin Warner). Critics took note of the inclusive nature of the exhibition, which counted not just artists from Boston and Philadelphia, Paris and Munich, but eight women, four of them students of William Morris Hunt. But of all the liberalizing measures instituted by the society, it would be the rules regarding selection, assuring fairness and a level playing field for all submissions, that would have the most far-reaching and dramatic effect on the American art world. Unlike the academy, which as recently as 1877 had changed its rules to guarantee its members two works on the line, the society compelled all submissions, those of members and nonmembers alike, to undergo a harrowing jury process, which virtually assured that only the very best works would be exhibited. In contrast, academy members were exempt from undergoing jury scrutiny, and although the infamous "eight-foot rule" was soon rescinded, academicians enjoyed the right of up to three exhibited works, one on the line. The society selection committee used a mathematical formula that included the covering of signatures on submissions, and then assigning numerical rankings to each work based on the cumulative score assigned by the jurors. In the early day of the society, perhaps to prevent undue pressure on jurors, the names of the selection committee members were not printed in the catalogue. The result in 1878, and in the following decades, was a relatively small exhibition of the finest quality work available anywhere in America, and quite possibly in Europe as well. The selection process was so stringent that a founding member like Helena de Kay Gilder worried that she would not get a work accepted, and years later, J. Francis Murphy (*Winter Hillside*, c. 1885, fig. 4.11) at the height of his fame around 1900, still agonized about his submissions to the society, and was relieved and gratified when his works passed a jury of his peers with high marks.

The selection procedure had a salutary effect: over the long term only professional artists of the highest caliber would make it into the annual exhibitions (fig. 4.12). Members, too, were carefully selected; the society's membership list contained, with only a few exceptions, the most outstanding artistic talents between 1878 and 1906. As will be seen in chapter 5, the New York Water Color Club, which formed in 1890, adopted a very similar vetting process, thus assuring its status as a professional artist's organization, while excluding the amateur artist or "Sunday painter" from its annual exhibitions. When the society and the academy drew up plans to combine in 1906, the society's strict vetting process, through which all were fated to pass, remained the single most troublesome point of contention in amalgamating the groups.

Another far-reaching and radical reform instituted by the society was its artistic hanging procedure—most likely established by La Farge—in which pictures were hung and arranged by color and tone, with size playing only a subordinate role. The academy had generally grouped pictures by size in massive wall-to-wall and ceiling-to-floor hangings. It is noteworthy that Charles de Kay, who would lead the charge for the appreciation of progressive art in America for the next thirty years, touting Tonalists like Currier, Ryder, Blakelock,

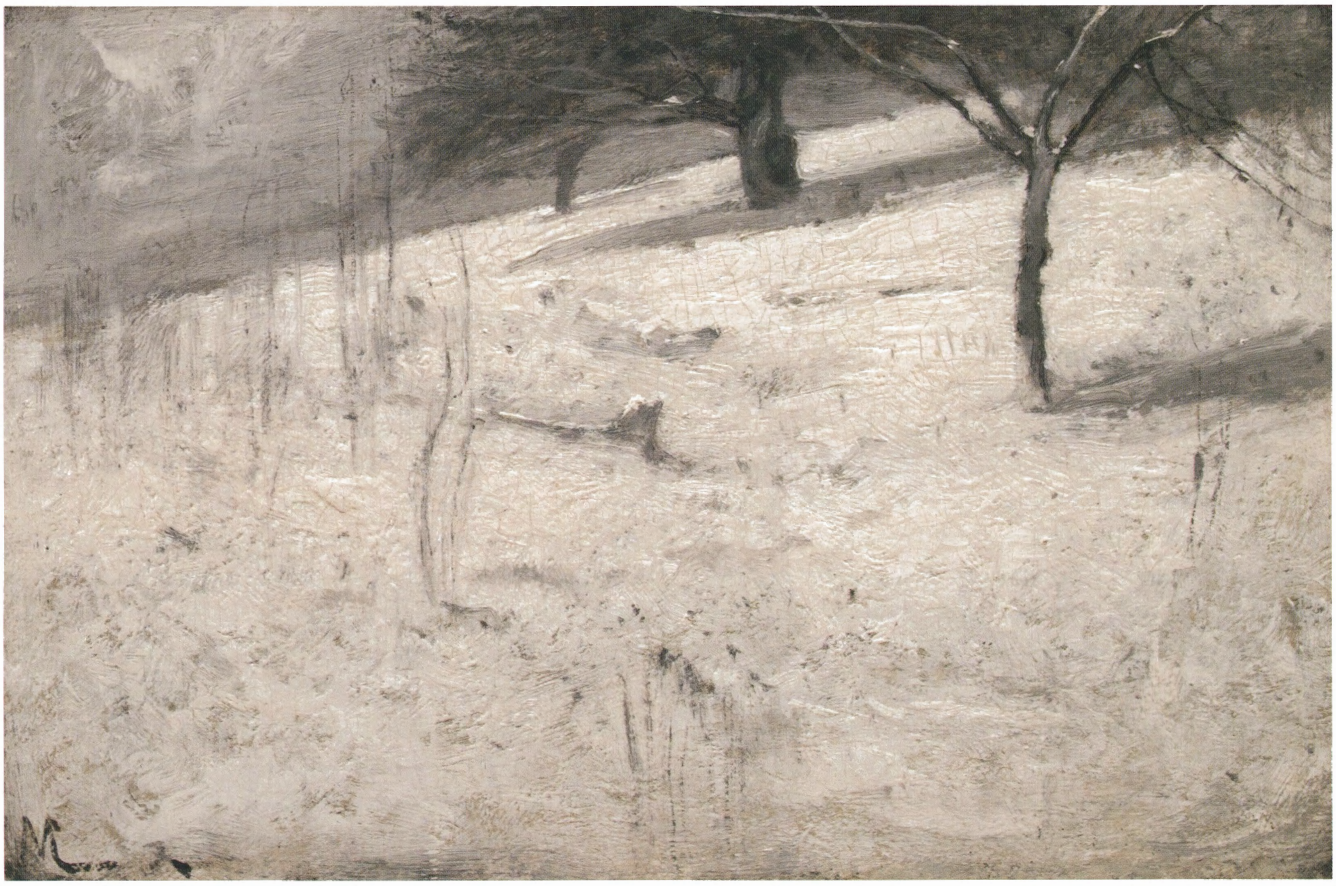


Fig. 4.11. J. Francis Murphy, *Winter Hillside*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 8 x 12 in. Private collection.

Whistler, and many more, would open his first review of the society's 1878 exhibition with praise for the skill of the hanging. "Great care has been exercised that the color of one should not interfere with the other. As a general thing, the canvases brilliant in tone have been placed on the west wall; those of a lower range on the south. But, besides this grateful and most unusual harmony, there is an impression of power in the work, taking the collection as a whole . . . here is a greater average representation of painters who are thoroughly grounded in the principles of their profession, than any other set of artists who have hitherto exhibited in this country. . . ."[26] The academy's lack of discrimination in the matter of artistic hanging, failing to take into account issues of "harmonious color," was a criticism de Kay leveled in an April 1878 *New York Times* review, a criticism he would repeat in variations over the following decades, condemning the academy for far too many pictures of low quality (de Kay would direct similar complaints against the American Watercolor Society and its massive exhibitions).[27]

The significance of this style of hanging is hard to overestimate. Grouping paintings according to tonal range not only allowed the lower-toned works to read better as a group but also highlighted their dramatic and expressive power, and may well have developed an evolving taste for lower-toned paintings. It is equally significant that the society's policy in this regard predates the development of similar hanging policies by Whistler for his own works at the Fine Arts Society in London in the early 1880s, his first American one-man show at H. Wunderlich & Co. in 1883, and later exhibitions mounted under his directorship of the Society of British Artists and the International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers. It is possible that Whistler, who was elected as a member of the Society of American Artists in 1886 (Whistler's *The Coast of Brittany*, 1861 [fig. 3.58], was exhibited at the society in 1878; his *Interior*, 1861, in 1879), knew about the society's innovative hanging policy, which may have influenced his own ideas in his relentless crusade for better artistic arrangement of pictures, including issues of simplified framing, more felicitous groupings, quality over quantity of exhibited works, and carefully controlled lighting. What we think of as modern hanging strategies, as opposed to the massed and often indiscriminate Victorian hangings, may have originated with the first exhibition of the society, later reinforced and enhanced by Whistler's innovations along similar lines.

De Kay's April 1878 review was clearly an insider's defense of the society against everything for which the academy stood. The critic tried to educate his audience, encouraging a better understanding of artistic paint handling and disabusing his readers of preconceived notions about the great bugaboo of the day, "lack of finish." He praised J. Alden Weir for his subdued and harmonious coloring, representative of the prevailing

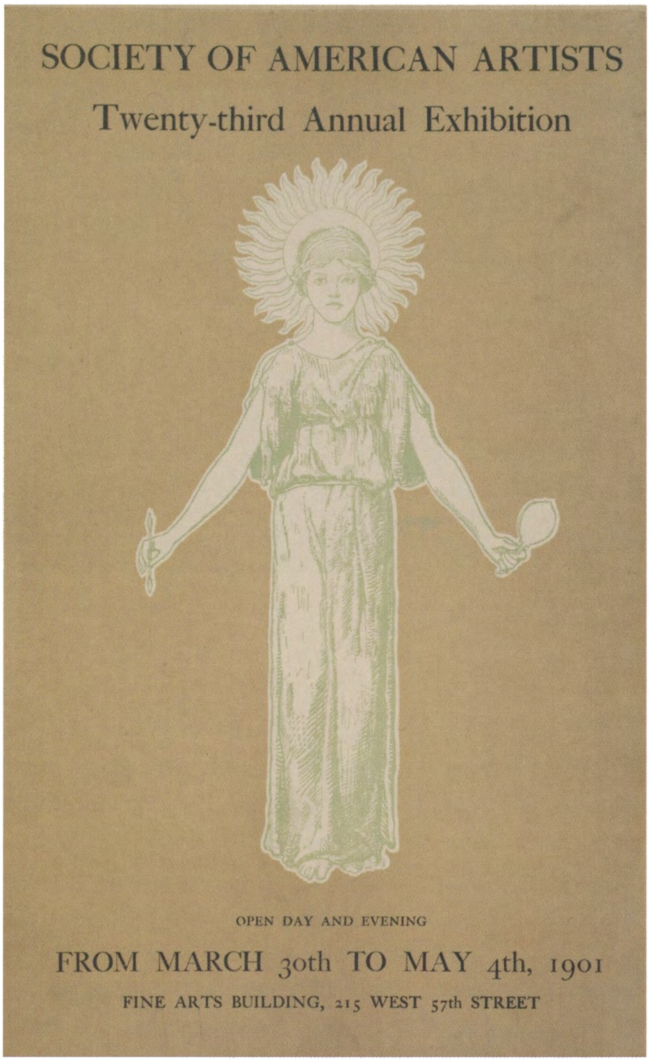

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARTISTS
Twenty-third Annual Exhibition
OPEN DAY AND EVENING
FROM MARCH 30th TO MAY 4th, 1901
FINE ARTS BUILDING, 215 WEST 57th STREET

Fig. 4.12. Poster for the 23rd Annual Exhibition of the Society of American Artists by Will Low (1853–1932). Art & Architecture Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallace Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

French style. De Kay noted the maxim, "If you cannot improve a picture, let it alone!" and he proceeded to demonstrate how William Merritt Chase's four works, varying in finish and lacking "sleek, round, and hard" forms, nevertheless displayed just the right amount of finish to do them full justice. J. Frank Currier was the toughest sell in the exhibition, even for de Kay, but the critic emphasized Currier's expressive Munich paint handling in his two landscapes—and a portrait strikingly reminiscent of Franz Hals—and praised the artist for his "undeniable force [and] low tints, with great streaks and dashes of paint." Within the year (as noted in chapter 3), Currier would take the New York watercolor world by storm with his works in the American Watercolor Society exhibition of 1879, which de Kay would praise mightily for bringing a new expressive force into American art.

A second de Kay review mentioned some late arrivals to the society's exhibition, especially two Venetian works by Frank Duveneck and John Henry Twachtman: Duveneck being praised for the fine sobriety—enhanced by not being overly finished—of his interior of Saint Mark's; and Twachtman for his painterliness and power. Clarence Cook in the *New York Tribune* also weighed in on Twachtman's Venetian studies: "all show a certain verity extremely valuable after the stage-play of the general run of artists who take Venice in hand."[28] Twachtman and fellow Munich men J. Frank Currier and Henry Muhrman would act as the shock troops in shaking up staid New York—all to be trumpeted by de Kay in the ensuing years. De Kay made it clear that the "irrepressible younger generation of painters" was on the march: "It may be safely said that never before has there been brought together a collection so creditable to American art." Gilder confederate Clarence Cook gave the first society show an even more exalted plug: "This exhibition means revolution. Here . . . Art in America . . . sets off in earnest to climb the heights. Here at last is painting for painting's sake; study, for youth's delight in study . . . the very look of the present exhibition must, I think be exhilarating. . . ."[29] The art for art's sake philosophy espoused by Cook (and further elaborated in his book on interior design, *The House Beautiful*, 1878) and embodied by the society on the eve of Whistler's libel trial against Ruskin, demonstrates just how well the ground had already been prepared in progressive art circles for Whistler's impending and bracing jolt to the American art psyche in the following decades.

Notwithstanding the critical praise from the Gilder press machine, the most far-reaching result of the formation of the Society of American Artists, visible in its first exhibition and growing steadily more pronounced with each subsequent show, was the development of the Tonalist landscape. While figurative art garnered the most attention and hanging space in the early years of the society, the eleven landscape artists who were among the founding members, and the names on the forty-five exhibited landscapes in 1878, read like a who's who of the Tonalist movement. There are the first-generation godfathers: Inness, Martin, Wyant, Hunt, and La Farge, soon to be joined by George Fuller and his mysterious and tenebrous New England landscapes (*The Shepherdess*, c. 1878, fig. 4.13). In 1879 de Kay described Fuller's style: "The general peculiarity of his pictures is a twilight duskiness with enough yellow in the colors to suggest somewhere a sunset now invisible."[30] La Farge, who exhibited *Autumn Sunset, Study of Bishop Berkley's Rock from the Valley behind Newport, R.I.* (location unknown) in 1878—a work probably dating from 1868—was still so innovative and ahead of his time that he was dismissed by the conservative press—even de Kay seems to have found La Farge's work, occasionally, a little indigestible.

In his reviews of the 1879 society annual exhibition, de Kay initiated a pattern of discussing the artwork—and he did the same in his reviews of the academy exhibitions—that consisted

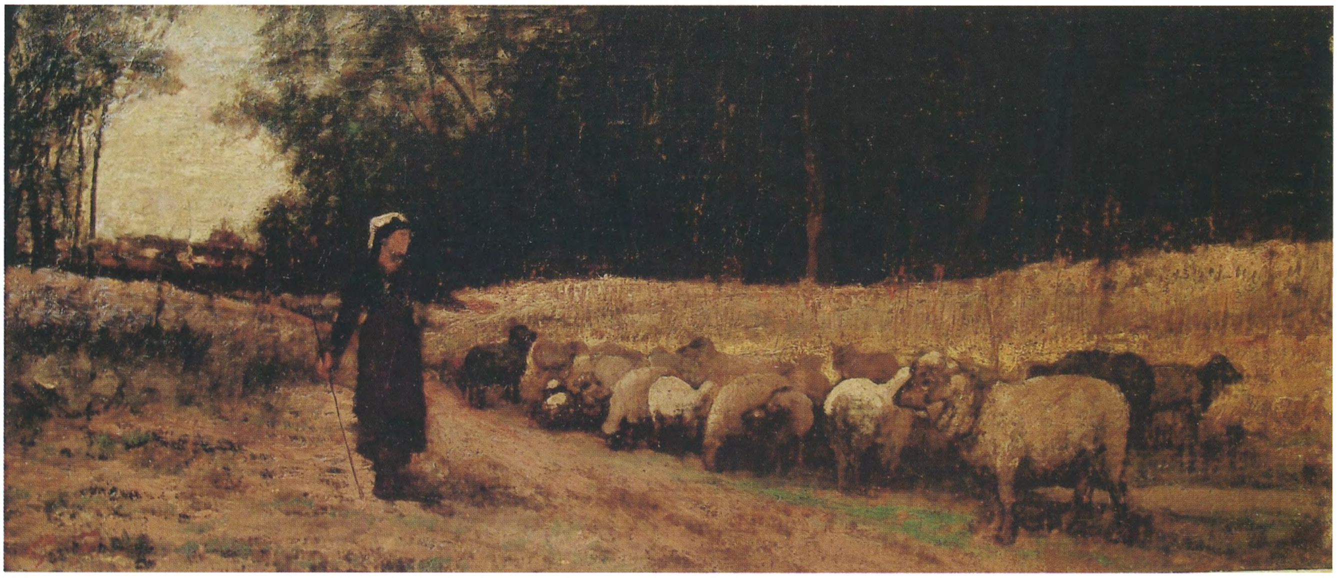


Fig. 4.13. George Fuller, *The Shepherdess*, c. 1878. Oil on board, 10 x 23¼ in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

of denigrating much of the figurative work and praising the landscapes of his favorites lavishly (those who painted in a distinctive American style), especially artists who worked in the spirit of his protégés Ryder and Blakelock. He even criticized figurative artists he liked—Dewing, in particular, who was an intimate of the Gilder circle—for imitating current French or English fashions in art, suggesting in no uncertain terms that they get themselves a more American outlook and subject. The upshot of his critical pressure, backed up by the Gilder press machine, was the ultimate establishment of the Tonalist landscape as *the* American art. In this quest for an original American style—for individuality and authenticity, de Kay was relentless over the course of his professional life (in 1898 he founded the National Arts Club to further the pursuit of this goal). His first review of the society's 1879 exhibition was a template for his didactic, bullying, and lecturing strategy, mixing devastating criticism with lush praise—determined to set American art on the road to glory. The review discusses at length figurative work by J. Alden Weir, Thomas Eakins, Alexander Wyant, Charles Warren Eaton, and William Merritt Chase—dismissing all except Eaton for various faults. La Farge comes off well. Of Eakins's masterpiece *The Gross Clinic*, de Kay recoils in horror at exposing the public to such a dreadful scene of blood and gore: "...the artist has no conception of where to stop in art.... Power it has, but very little art." But when the reviewer reaches Homer Dodge Martin his rhetoric soars. "In the corner... is a golden landscape by Homer D. Martin, golden in actual hue, and golden in the Oriental sense which connects with that word the ideas of beauty and strength. It represents a late stage of a clear sunset behind trees, the light striking through them on a lake, and giving to its smooth surface a red-gold burnish." De Kay goes on to describe another Martin landscape employing the descriptive phrases that, for him, evoke a distinctive American characteristic and capture the expressive interior emotion at the core of the Tonalist aesthetic: "...full of the most exquisite beauty... the colors... blend and interact in a most subtle and suggestive manner... [the landscapes] have the quality of interesting the more the longer they are watched... luminous and suggestive of poetic thoughts." The critic's words often draw his readers in as one who is revealing secret truths to the "untrained eye." The review finds Albert Pinkham Ryder to be "another painter who often raises an involuntary smile by the oddity and apparent naïveté of his pictures; but for the close observer the smile is sure to be more of pleasure than disdain. Probably no pictures here, not even the broadest painted heads by defiant impressionists like Whistler and Currier, will rouse more diverse emotions than Mr. Ryder's work. As to his one landscape here, called 'Spring'(*Spring*, 1879, fig. 4.14) it is truly caviar to the multitude."[31] As will be discussed, de Kay and the Gilder circle would be instrumental in raising Ryder—and Blakelock—to the unprecedented status of American icons.

Reinforcing de Kay's special pleading for the society and Ryder in particular, William Brownell, writing a series on young American painters in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1880, described the success of the Society of Americans Artists as a triumph of feeling over form in art. Brownell illustrated Ryder's *Spring*—the first publication to do so—and warned against criticizing Ryder's awkwardness with figures lest the artist lose his originality. "If he should suddenly realize their shortcomings in these respects and attempt to correct them out of hand, we should fear for their poetic feeling, their engaging color, and their softness and tenderness; even to lose their fragmentariness would, one feels, be risky."[32]

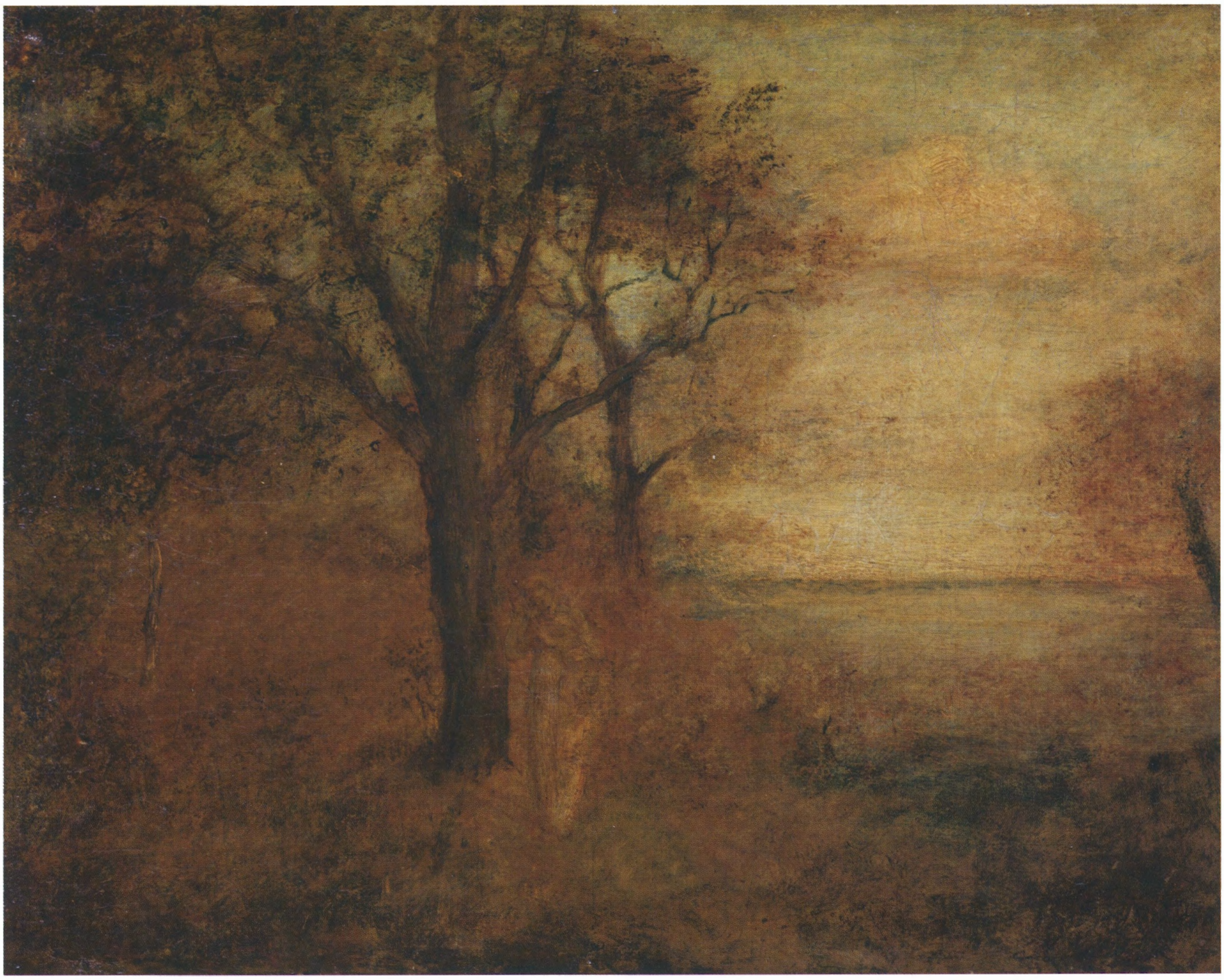


Fig. 4.14. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Spring*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 14¼ x 18¼ in. The Toledo Museum of Art. Gift of Florence Scott Libbey, 23.3134.

In his second review of the society's 1879 annual exhibition (the *Times* critic often saved his real hobbyhorses for his second reviews), de Kay begins with a tirade against Hudson River artist Frederic Church, deriding his ambition to reproduce Niagara Falls in all its literal detail, and further dismissing Church with the suggestion that a good photograph would do as well. De Kay then goes on to explain that William Morris Hunt's exhibited *Niagara* has improved on Church's naive effort by focusing on the suggestive qualities of nature's majestic display: "He gives us fine dashes of color in the river, falls, and spray, and impresses us with a certain vitality in the waterfall, while he misses the feeling of massive downpour."[33]

In 1880, de Kay presciently singled out Ralph Albert Blakelock for a landscape reminiscent of Narcisse Diaz: "It is quite a charming little landscape, the sky being especially deep and fine in tone."[34] He extravagantly praised Henry Muhrman's four landscape watercolors in the society's exhibition of 1880, and William Gedney Bunce for his idiosyncratic Venetian views: ". . . if they do not show Mr. Bunce to be a colorist, they do show that he knows how to use color. His range of color is limited, but within that range he produces very handsome and charming effects of a kind which we have not yet had much of in this country. He looks at Venice through eyes very different from his predecessors on the Adriatic."[35] John Henry Twachtman, too, was praised for his Venetian scene, de Kay noting that the artist did best with somber moods away from strong sunlight: "Where this artist succeeds is in tasteful contrasts of color, which avoid antagonism and have a tendency to confine themselves to a small scale of shades. Olive greens and low marine blues are favorites with him."[36] De Kay often commended Robert Swain Gifford and Alexander Wyant. The latter, in particular, as has already been seen, was a favorite exemplar of how the old landscape school could be reformed: "Mr. Wyant has been losing of late years his overmuch sweetness and weakness, and is a standing evidence of the value to Academicians of a little society like this, since it acts on all who are able to be acted upon as a stimulus to exertion in a new direction."[37]

De Kay, in his position as *New York Times* art critic, Society of American Artists booster, and Gilder circle insider, acted

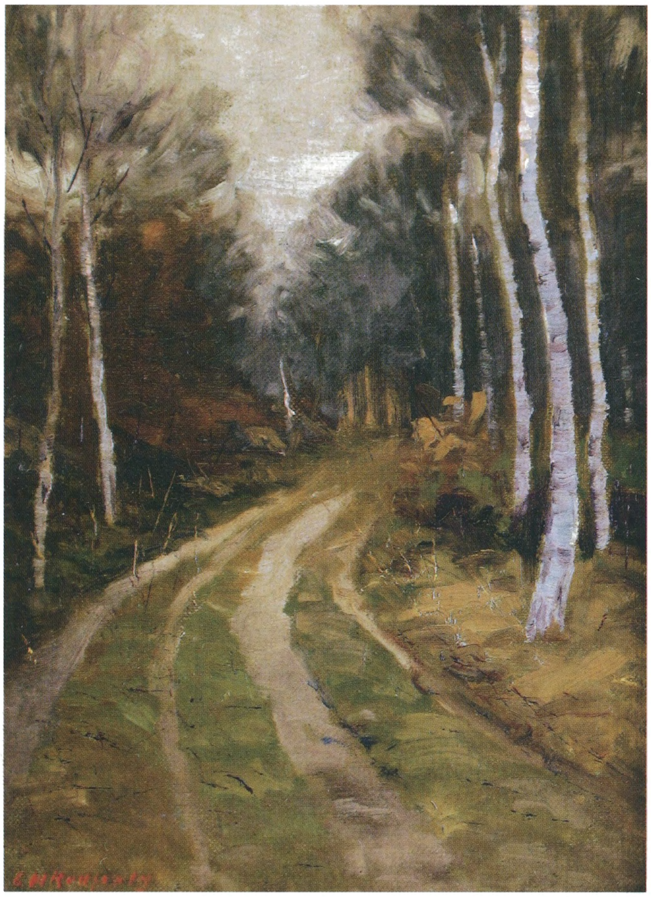


Fig. 4.15. Edward Redfield, *In the Forest of Fontainebleau, France*, c. 1898. Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 in. Courtesy Hawthorne Fine Art, New York.

as a one-man crusader for the Tonalist movement, alternately exalting, demonstrating, and elucidating aspects of the Tonalist style as he praised the works of the major landscape painters of the movement, goaded the figurative artists to paint American, and later disparaged the more imitative work of the American Impressionists. Spurred on by the critic's enthusiasm for an "American art," the society, along with the Art Students League (the two organizations merged resources in 1892 under the aegis of the Fine Arts Society, constructing a purpose-built headquarters on Fifty-seventh Street for the school and exhibition space for the society), acted as an incubator and talent launching pad for the Tonalist movement. The trajectory of the Tonalist movement can be tracked over almost three decades through society membership, exhibitions, prizes, sales, and critical accolades. The academy played a complementary if lagging role, but the brightest stars and their best work were consistently featured in the society annuals, demonstrating, in most critics' reviews, the comparative failures of the work shown at the academy. During the difficult decade of the 1880s, and the even more disastrous economic depression of the late 1890s, the society established the reputation of the founding generation of Tonalists, born before 1840, and subsequently promoted and sustained the younger, core generation of Tonalists born between 1840 and 1865. The finest second-generation Tonalists, born after 1865, many of whom studied in Paris around the turn of the century, like Edward Redfield (*In the Forest of Fontainebleau, France*, c. 1898, fig. 4.15), Robert Henri, and Chauncey Ryder (*French Landscape*, c. 1900, fig. 4.16), often got their American start in the last years of the society's exhibitions, at the very moment when Whistler's influence was reaching its zenith in Europe.

The numbers alone speak volumes. In 1878, out of 124 exhibited works, 45 were landscapes, or about 40 percent. In 1879, of 168 exhibited works, 70 were landscapes, or around 45 percent. These levels would remain constant with some fluctuations up or down right through the mid-1880s. The predominance of figurative, portrait, and genre works in the early years of the society stands to reason, since many of the young painters returning from European training had cut their teeth on figurative work, and the figurative storytelling tradition stressed in the European ateliers still carried cachet back in America, at least for a time. The American market would never be truly propitious for figurative work, however; the old Hudson River School might be dead or dying, but the market for landscapes did not die with it; in fact, it only strengthened. When Samuel Isham, a portrait painter and member of the society, bemoaned in his influential *History of American Art* (published in 1905) the financial hardships faced by the returning expatriates, he was probably thinking in terms of those who clung to the figural tradition: most had to teach to make ends meet. For landscape painters, the situation was not quite so dire. Inness, Wyant, and even Martin had managed to make a living from their progressive landscapes (with a few potboilers thrown in when financially necessary).

In addition to the founding and early members of the society who were landscape painters, other landscape artists began to join and exhibit, first in a trickle and then in increasingly larger numbers. As noted earlier, Blakelock made an appearance as early as 1880; in 1881 Charles Melville Dewey

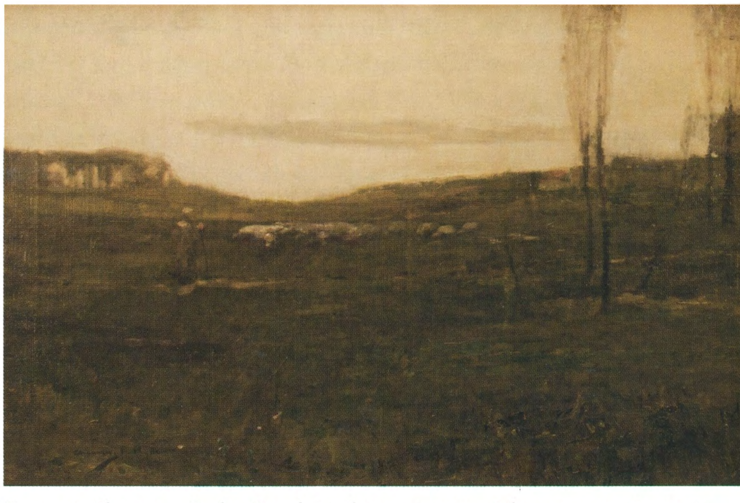


Fig. 4.16. Chauncey Ryder, *French Landscape*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 18 x 30 in. Private collection.

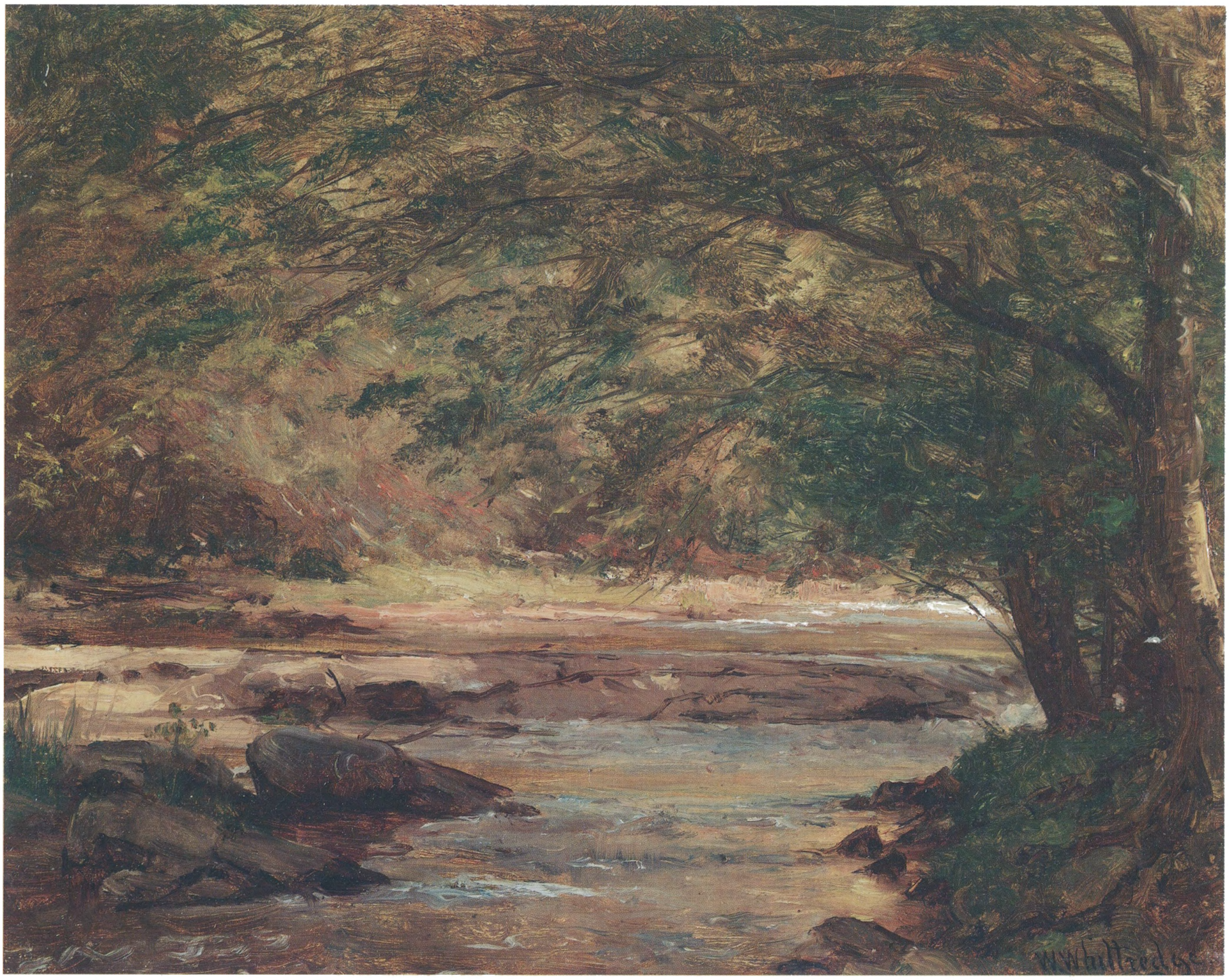


Fig. 4.17. Worthington Whittredge, *Sunshine on the Brook*, c. 1880–90. Oil on canvas, 12 x 15 ⅜ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

and Bruce Crane became members, and J. Francis Murphy and Hugh Bolton Jones exhibited landscapes for the first time. The 1881 exhibition was notable for the toughness of the selection process—only one-third of 400 submissions were accepted—and the appearance of a painting by Jules Bastien-Lepage, who had so inspired the Harrison brothers, J. Alden Weir, and many other Americans working in France. The atmospheric quality of Bastien-Lepage's style (the French tonal envelope) and the use of a high horizon to dramatize foreground elements became increasingly popular among society artists. By 1881 critics noted that the bravura style of Munich, so prevalent in the earliest exhibitions, had been greatly toned down. De Kay also mentioned in a review of an 1881 exhibition held by the Artists' Fund Society (formed to help aged and destitute artists) that the younger painters were having a positive influence on National Academy artists of the Hudson River School: "This sign is the improvement in the work even of many of those older painters whose case seemed most desperate, whose vicious system of technique seemed most unchangeable ... the work of Messrs. Cropsey, Hicks, Beard, Cranch, Hubbard, and Whittredge (*Sunshine on the Brook*, c. 1880–90, fig. 4.17) is certainly stronger than it used to be; or, if not in each case stronger, betrays the trace of self-examination and endeavor to change their former styles."[38] In this, de Kay sounds less like the critic and more like a prophet calling sinners to a new path. Another Hudson River School painter, Jervis McEntee (1828–91), would also adjust his style in the 1880s to the prevailing winds of change (*Woman at the Edge of the Woods*, 1880, fig. 4.18).

The 1882 society exhibition saw the grand entrance of Whistler's famous *Portrait of the Artist's Mother* (1871, Musée d'Orsay), a work that quickly slipped into the artistic consciousness of the nation: the painting became a template for controlled tonal planes, sublimely subtle gradations of color, and a general flattening of perspective and decorative arrangement of form. De Kay was almost beside himself as he led off his 1882 review in praise of Whistler and his already near-iconic *Arrangement in Gray and Black No. 1* (the painting's alternate title). "How little it matters what a picture is called may be seen by this portrait. Arrangement or not, it is a very extraordinary performance. No other painter has

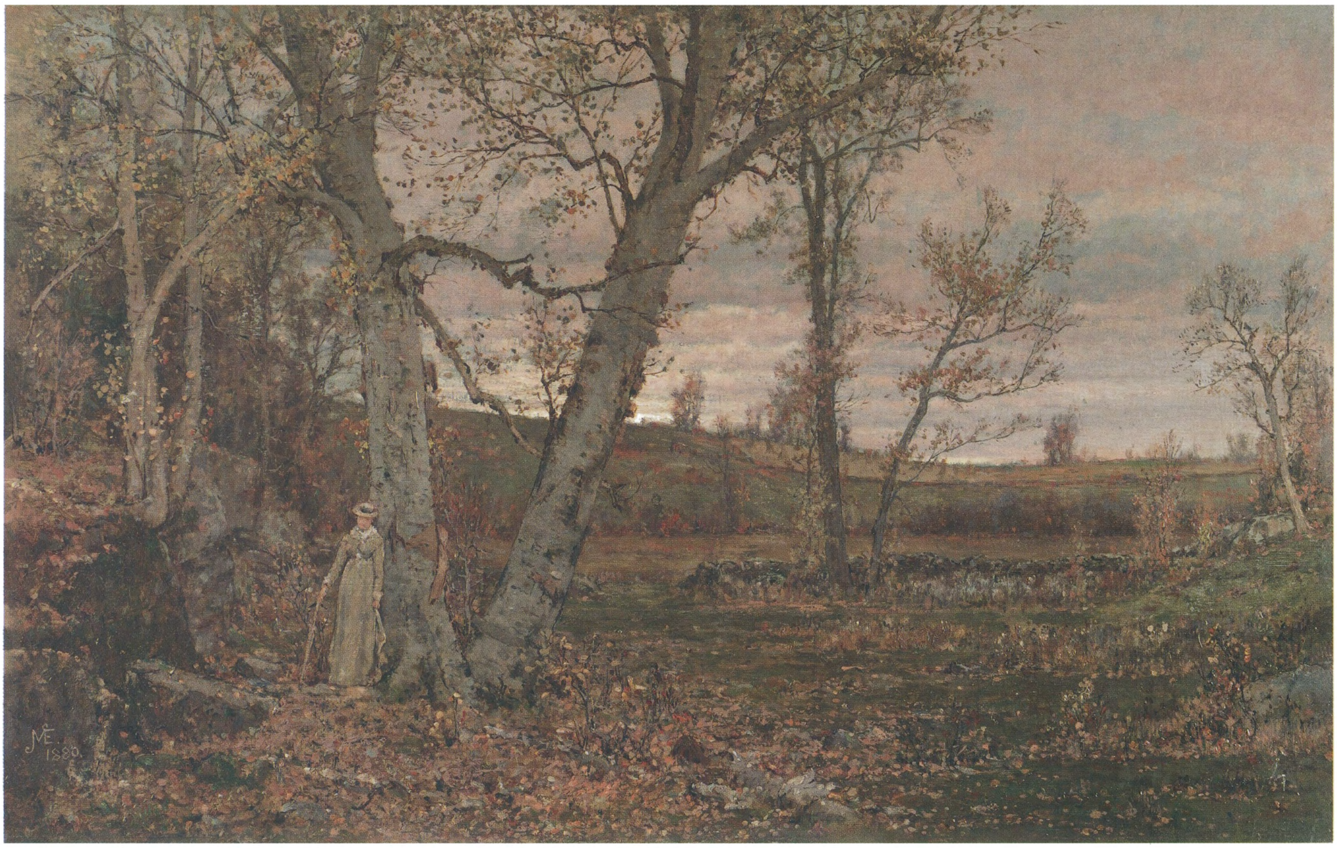


Fig. 4.18. Jervis McEntee, *Woman on the Edge of the Woods*, 1880. Oil on board, 20⅛ x 31⅞ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

the distinctive quality that Mr. Whistler has shown; his is thoroughly original, and at the same time handles his work in a way that may surprise painters, but is also certain to arouse their interest, if not their envy . . . he was a genius of high rank at the time he painted this. . . ."[39] The "original" and "distinctive quality" Whistler represented for American art was a criterion of worth that de Kay would insist on for the best American art. It was, in effect, his manifesto for a modern American art that had digested the best Europe had to offer and reformulated it in an original American manner, or as Henry James had called it, with "our unprecedented spiritual lightness."

In 1882 the number of Society of American Artists members jumped from forty-five to sixty-one (in contrast to the National Academy of Design, there was never an upper limit placed on membership), and a cadre of important Tonalists made their appearance, including Dennis Miller Bunker, Ben Foster, Alexander Harrison, Birge Harrison, J. Alden Weir (who had three landscapes and was responsible for the inclusion of his friend and mentor Jules Bastien-Lepage in the 1881 society annual exhibition), and William Sartain, who began to show American landscapes for the first time. With landscapes comprising 58 out of 128 works on view in the 1882 society annual exhibition, paintings by the landscapists were beginning to be the equal of the figurative work on view. The landscape artists in particular were beginning to look to fellow society member Alexander Wyant, who, trying to fathom the artistic continuity of the society in its early days, complained: "I believe that nobody knows yet where they come in, and for this reason: they haven't done enough American things; they haven't sufficiently tried their skill in depicting the life of their own land."[40] Increasingly, the Tonalist landscape painters would do just that, employing the technical and stylistic tools of Munich, Paris, and the Breton art colonies to depict the face of their own land—precisely as William MacKay Laffan had recommended in his 1880 *American Art Review* article (see chap. 3, p. 96).

By 1882 Munich virtuoso William Merritt Chase—president of the society by 1884—was beginning to exhibit American landscapes showing the influence of Whistler and a more decorative disposition. In 1882 J. Frank Currier showed three landscapes along with Homer Dodge Martin's *Newport Landscape*, while Tonalists Walter Lunt Palmer, Theodore Robinson (a Tonalist early in his career), Abbott Thayer, and Robert Van Boskerck (*Road to Newark*, 1880, fig. 4.19) were showing American landscapes. The decorative aesthetic galvanized by Whistler's rising influence was gaining converts in the society's exhibitions, much to the dismay of the old-line critics and to the delight of liberal reviewers like Mariana Van Rensselaer, who, a few years earlier, had offered extensive praise for Currier's expressive watercolors: ". . . it is every year becoming more and more an acknowledged fact that the mere presence of a picture on the walls of this exhibition is a guaranty of excellence; and year by year our artists, old as well as young, are getting to preserve their best work more exclusively for this occasion."[41]

The 1882 exhibition (which took place in two parts) also offered de Kay a chance to firmly stake out his critical position as to what constituted progressive art, much as Clement Greenberg would do in the 1950s when he chose his apostles of Abstract Expressionism. De Kay, while praising a near-life-sized crucified Christ by Thomas Eakins for its technical prowess, nevertheless deemed it "repulsive, if that term be not too harsh. It is an unnecessary picture. There seems in the present no room and no reason for it. Will the devoutest Roman Catholic be moved by it? Hardly. The 'lift' is too heavy for Mr. Eakins. He cannot get back to the ages when an audience stood ready to applaud an artist who painted such a picture realistically, and could inspire him, even should he be himself a skeptic, with a portion of their common faith. In certain technical ways very fine, this crucifixion leaves one completely cold, and chiefly regretful that talents as genuine as those of Mr. Eakins should have been applied to so little profit."[42] De Kay's harsh handling of this and other figurative works of Eakins was characteristic of his tough criticism of figurative painters across the board, including Winslow Homer and Thomas Dewing, and especially the idealized figures of a painter (and society stalwart) such as Kenyon Cox. De Kay represented the nexus of the inhospitable climate for figurative art in New York, which was, in his judgment, overly realistic, narrative, sentimental, unduly religious, idealized—or, worst of all, initiative of French academic blather. It was a critical climate that slowly but surely swung the pendulum of progressive energy away from enthusiasm for figurative art in 1880 toward a new landscape poetics, particularly the intimate landscape of Aesthetic Tonalism with its emphasis on decorative design and subtle charm.

In the same review of the 1882 society exhibition, de Kay made clear the kind of landscape he had in mind as a model. Comparing a large detailed view of Venice by Walter Launt Palmer, swathed in pink tonalities, to a series of smaller Venetian marines by William Gedney Bunce, "consumed by yellow," de Kay lectured his readers on the critical distinction of sentiment produced by aesthetic means: color, form, composition, and sentiment of narrative detail. "There is this difference, however, between the little yellow marines of the latter and the pink monster of Mr. Palmer. In the Bunces the effort is frankly for color and sentiment through color. The details are quite secondary, and may be supplied by any of the innumerable and excellent photographs of Venice to be had everywhere. In the Palmer, on the other hand, the effort is for a panoramic view with all the details brought out. Of course, Mr. Palmer, who is a promising young artist in his way, has also sought for tone. But even supposing his tone were agreeable, and to the writer it is not pleasing, the objection would still hold that the attention is

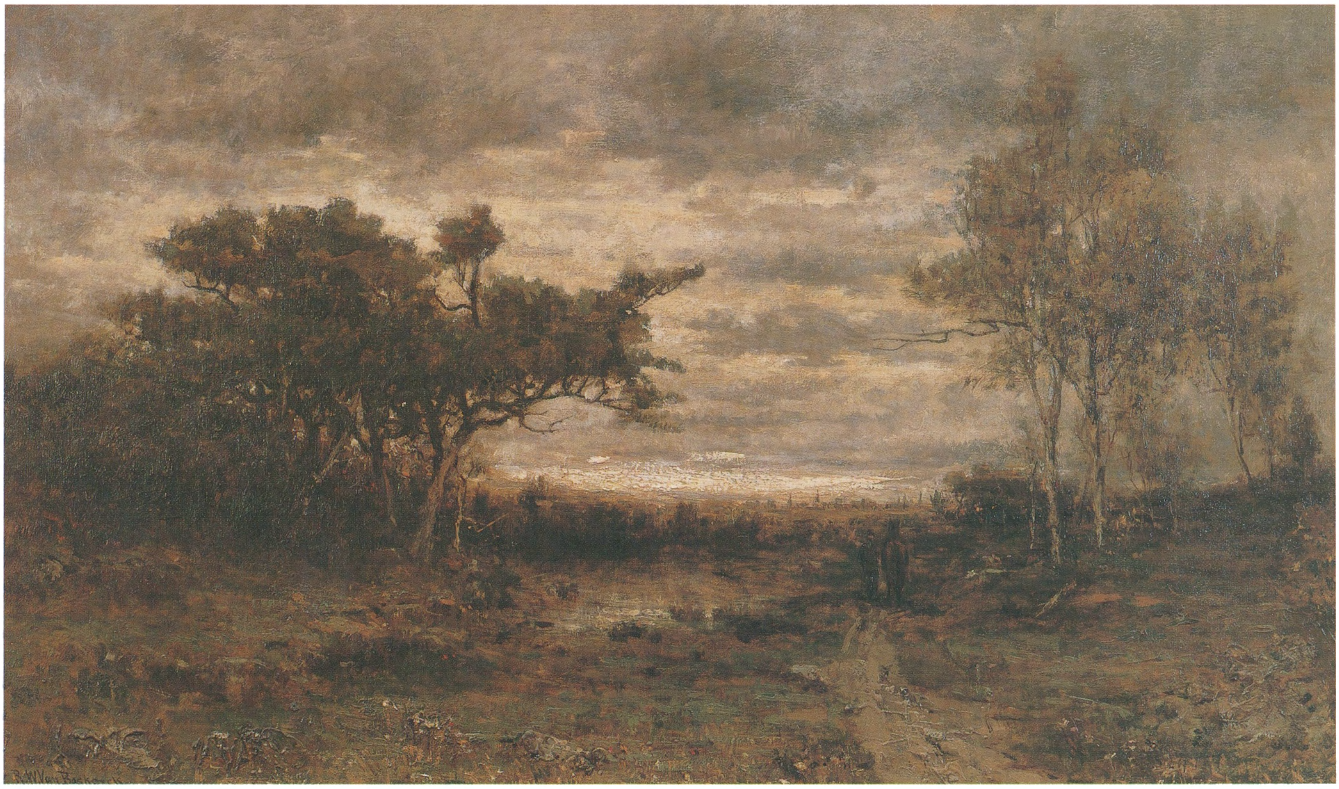


Fig. 4.19. Robert Van Boskerck, *Road to Newark*, c. 1880. Oil on canvas, 18 x 30 in. Private collection.

deflected from the higher, more poetical, more musical effects of air, water, and city to much more material and commonplace ideas."[43] Such higher, poetical, and musical effects of design, pattern, composition, and exquisite soft-edged tonalities—as preached by de Kay—became essential to Aesthetic Tonalism from the early 1880s into the late 1890s.

By 1883 and 1884 the society was nearing the 50 percent mark in total landscapes exhibited, including the first works of Tonalists William Lathrop, Charles Warren Eaton, and the influential Charles Harold Davis, whose richly atmospheric French landscapes (*Deepening Shadows*, 1884, fig. 4.20) would be a revelation, further reinforcing the atmospheric quality derived from Bastien-Lepage and his acolytes, J. Alden Weir and the Harrison brothers. By 1883 the use of the unified color schemes of the Aesthetic movement had become so pronounced in the society's annual exhibition that a conservative critic lamented "the growth of tendencies toward mannerism especially marked among the numerous 'toneists' and 'colorists.'"[44] The decorative aesthetic was also on the rise, signaled by the controversy over Thomas Dewing's 1883 genre work *A Prelude* and the disastrous controversies that swirled around the society exhibition of 1884, in which the society's president, William Merritt Chase, was upbraided for taking over a quarter of the hanging space for his Art Students League students, including reserving six spots for his own work. *The Art Interchange* called Chase's work, "bizarre, theatric, and coarse," and accused him of have a "disastrous moral effect on the exhibition."[45] *Art Amateur* piled on with "the greatest exhibition of charlatanry that the public of New York has ever been amused with."[46] Critics took exception to the emphasis on decorative works in which surface texture, flat modeling, and subtle tonality seemed the only raison d'être of the artwork. Even Charles de Kay turned on the society in 1884, denigrating Chase's figurative efforts for what he considered their technical dazzle solely for the sake of showing off the artist's formidable technique, and most of all for care "bestowed on the details, not on any remarkable sentiment, grace of composition, or beauty of work." De Kay went on decry Chase for taking over the exhibition (the rumor was that 500 to 700 works had been submitted for 88 spaces) for himself and his students. The critic then took George de Forest Brush and Kenyon Cox to task—Cox would remain de Kay's punching bag for years to come—for an insipid nude, "a ridiculous performance." The only raves by de Kay were for J. Francis Murphy and his protégés Albert Ryder and Ralph Albert Blakelock—who, for de Kay and the Gilder circle, represented the future of the society and American art. "R.A. Blakelock shows a finely luminous ideal landscape and a rich wooded scene like an enamel, which shows his genuine love for tones . . . and Albert Ryder a marine in a curious scheme of color, the waves full of dash, the ideal bark flying across the water, the clouds original and fantastic after a fashion of which he alone knows the secret."[47] The society

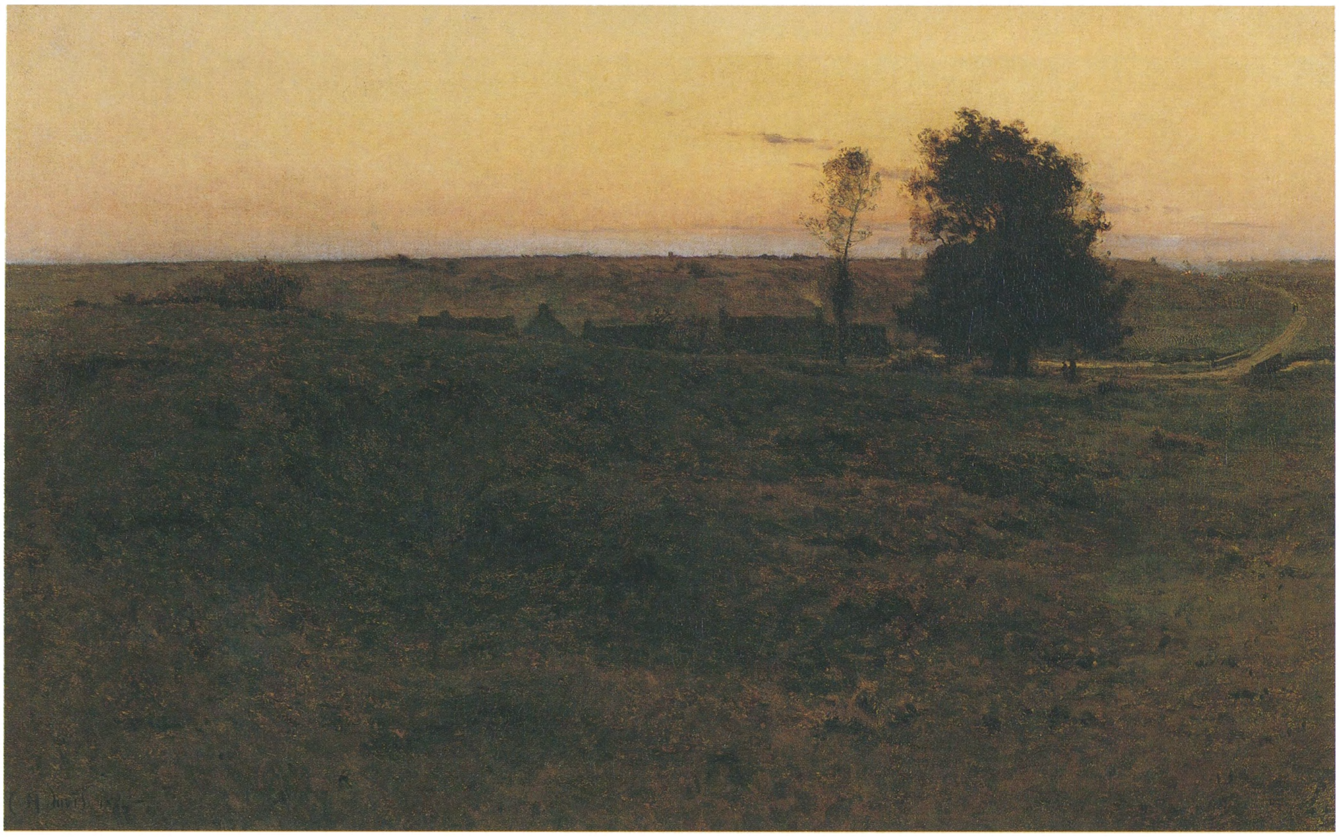


Fig. 4.20. Charles Harold Davis, *Deepening Shadows*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 29 x 45 in. Courtesy Garzoli Gallery, San Rafael, CA.

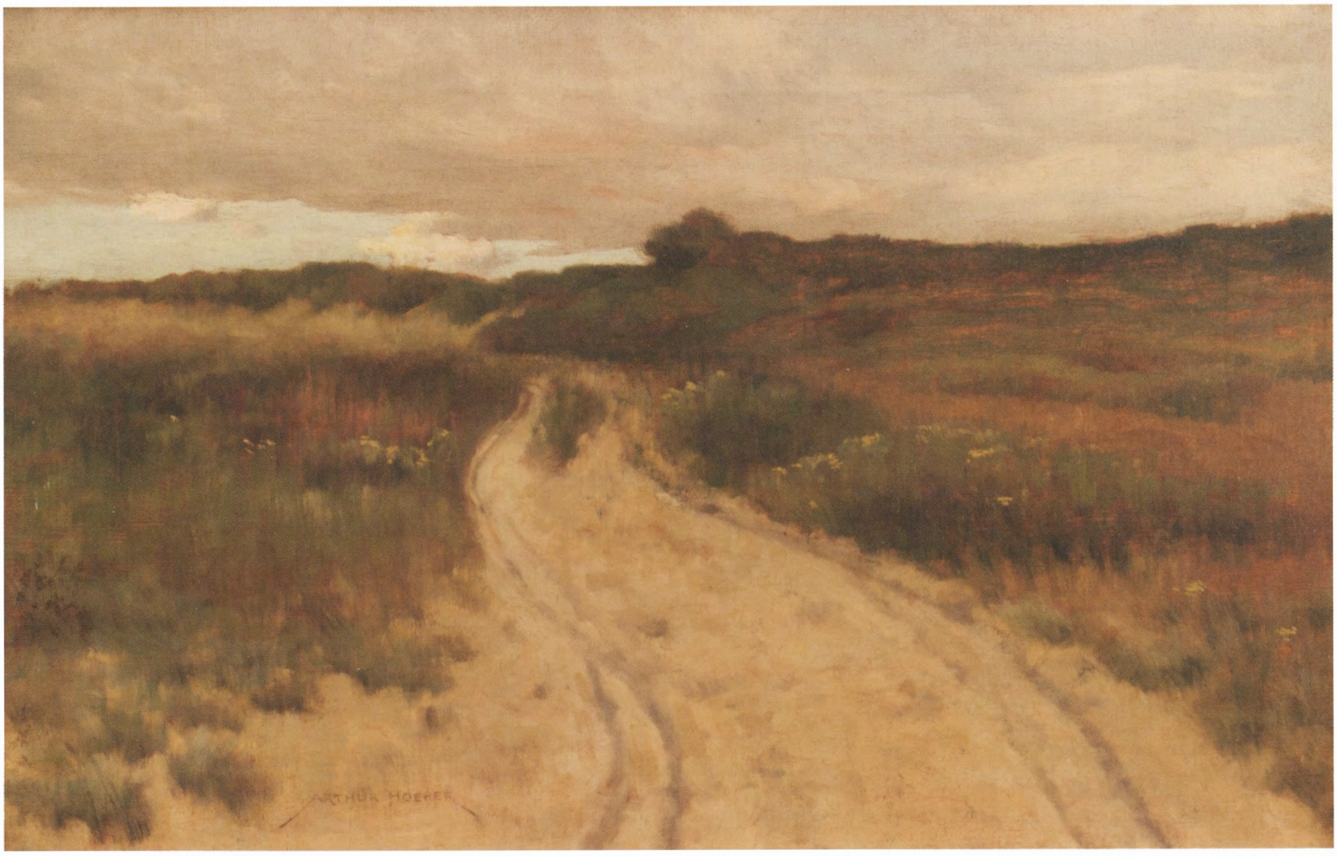


Fig. 4.21. Arthur Hoeber, *Dusk on the Dunes*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 14 x 22 ¼ in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

also blundered by renting the exhibition space of the National Academy during the year, which the more fervent society members considered anathema, if not an abandonment of the independent principles on which the society was founded.

This political stumble was so traumatic that the society failed to mount an annual exhibition in 1885, and only managed to regain its balance in 1886 and 1887, with de Kay and the Gilder circle cheering on the society's efforts at renovation. This interregnum marked a watershed. Never again in the nineteenth century would die-hard critics exert quite such a negative rebuke to the progressive forces in American art. More to the point, however, from 1886 on, de Kay's harsh handling of the European-trained figurative artists would have its effect: landscapes, particularly American scenes and landscapes by homegrown American artists like Ryder and Blakelock with little or no foreign training, began to make major inroads into society exhibitions. The native artists like Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, Ben Foster, and J. Francis Murphy started to fill the exhibitions, all to lesser or greater degrees transforming European-derived techniques and styles into hybrid and peculiarly American expressions. De Kay would be relentless in pursuit of his goal of pushing American art in the direction of its innate strengths and natural disposition. The 1886 society annual exhibition saw the appearance of three landscapes by William A. Coffin and the first landscapes by Arthur Hoeber (*Dusk on the Dunes*, c. 1890, fig. 4.21), Frederick W. Kost, Leonard Ochtman, and William Merritt Post. Even William Merritt Chase now began regularly contributing landscapes of near-at-home scenes, intimate, charming, and showing more feeling than his earlier bravura works, full of technical mastery but leaving many cold. In 1887 the society instituted the Webb Prize for landscape, to be awarded each year for the best landscape by an artist under the age of forty; J. Francis Murphy, one of the major indigenous Tonalist artists, took the first Webb Prize. The list of Webb Prize winners boasted the major names in American Tonalism and included John Henry Twachtman, Dwight Tryon, Ben Foster, Leonard Ochtman, and Bruce Crane.

Of the eighty-nine society members in 1887, thirty-two were landscape artists. For the first time in 1888, the number of landscapes exhibited surpassed 50 percent (72 out of 137 exhibited works), and the membership exceeded 100 (109), a level that would be sustained and expanded in the coming years. The Committee of Selection, or jury, now included Tonalists J. Francis Murphy, Twachtman, Robert Blum, William A. Coffin, Tryon, Weir, La Farge, and Chase (Chase exhibited four intimate Whistlerian landscapes painted near his Brooklyn home). Tellingly, the titles of many of the landscapes are evocative of mood—rarely of place or indicating an overt narrative intent: *Evening, Fog, Moonrise Late Afternoon, Twilight, Towards Evening, Early Moonrise, November Gloom, Late Afternoon, Moonlight, Night, Dawn, A Rainy Day, Winter,*

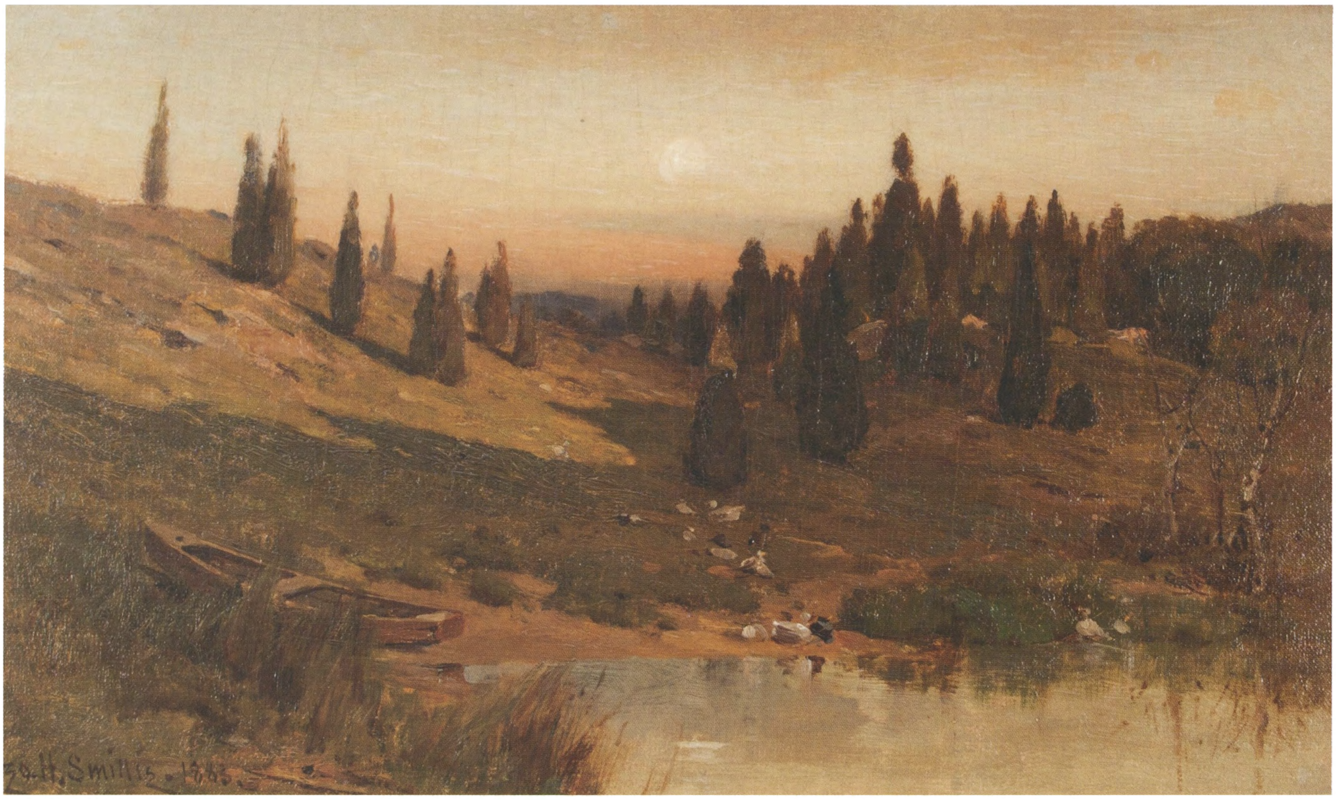


Fig. 4.22. George Smillie, *Evening among the Cedars*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 9 x 15 in. Private collection.

Gentle Spring, Frosty Meadows, Foggy Day on the Sands, Autumn Evening, The Moorland Pool, All the Blooming Flush of Life is Fled, October Evening, Moonrise in December. By 1889 the number of landscapes had reached well over 50 percent (90 out of 169), a percentage that would largely be sustained and often surpassed in the 1890s. The 1890 society annual exhibition was, in de Kay's estimation, the best to date: "It is no exaggeration to say that in Europe one would have to wait long before meeting with a collection of 206 pieces of painting and sculpture, composed of the current work of local painters, which would compare with this. In other words, New York has now an annual exhibition which succeeds to a very creditable extent in avoiding the bane of the great shows of Paris and London—numbers without selection, quantity without quality."[48]

While he was promoting the fledgling Society of American Artists, de Kay was constantly disparaging the older National Academy of Design, often comparing its antediluvian attitudes with the more enlightened policies of the society. In an 1879 review of the academy, de Kay dismissed the "fifty square yards of clap-trap." He condemned the-bigger-the-better attitude of the old-school painters and their uncultivated buyers. "No; size will not help a picture. On the contrary, it becomes at once an element of weakness, unless the subject and the style are on an equal scale." De Kay dealt with Thomas Moran's large narrative works in short order and then reviewed with a despairing sigh the typical Orientalist views on offer, a staple of the academy exhibitions at this time. "As usual at an Academy exhibition we have one or two painters who have been to the East and show their 'impressions of voyage.'" Dispatching these prosaic views of street life in Cairo and ancient ruins, "photographed in drab color on a large canvas," de Kay noted: "There was never much meaning in these large paintings of ruins before photography was invented, and since then they are a sheer waste of time. Of course, if the painter can give anything else that the photograph can not, a small picture is excusable." All of this was fodder for de Kay's campaign to promote intimate and expressive landscapes of a distinctly American character. De Kay took care of the former powers-that-be of the academy with a backhanded compliment: "It is an old story that the movement leading to the foundation of the Students' Art League and the Society of American Artists has profoundly influenced a certain number of the older men who are not so thoroughly wedded to a system of art that change is impossible."[49] In the early 1880s many of the older Hudson River School painters—Jervis McEntee and Worthington Whittridge, as has been seen, were probably the most successful—did try to adjust their styles to the more progressive, broadly painted, and expressive mode, then the rage in the society exhibitions. George Smillie, too, raised in the Hudson River School tradition, began to paint exquisite Tonalist landscapes in the decades after 1880 (*Evening Among the Cedars*, 1883, fig. 4.22). De Kay ruthlessly bullied the diehards. Even in 1884, the academy membership and exhibiting policies thoroughly rankled de Kay, especially the academy's failure to seek out the best and brightest among the younger artists, to embrace them and give them a respectful showing in the annual exhibitions. "The Academy does not pose for eclecticism; it has never sent runners out to the studios to beg the best pictures from the most original artists; it fears greatly lest the rising young men of the profession should overvalue themselves because of its encouragement and the risen young men take on still more the airs of the victorious."[50] He noted that the academicians dominated all the best hanging spaces and dispatched the best work of nonmembers to the shadowy heights of the exhibition areas. De Kay went on to accuse the academy of a safe and shrewd mercantile policy and illiberal stance toward the progressive forces; he even went so far as to advocate a boycott of the academy by the younger artists until their elders brought about reforms. "Those who have the interests of the profession at heart ought to hope that the Academy will never again have a chance to deck itself with borrowed plumes, [display the best young talents but not allow them membership] unless it shows a disposition to admit to membership artists manifestly higher in attainments than the majority of the men who now manage it with such conspicuous illiberality."[48] By 1887, the constant barrage of his criticism—and through his insider connections de Kay knew the precise nature of the behind-the-scenes politics of the academy—had a meliorating effect: the academy's committee of selection, guided by the "more advanced spirits," had limited the numbers of exhibited works and raised the standard of merit. De Kay noted the inclusion of Hugh Bolton Jones, Robert Swain Gifford, and John La Farge on the selection committee—all important members of the Society of American Artists, who were helpful in moving the academy in a progressive direction. Under de Kay's constant drubbing, the academy would adopt more and more of the society's standards in the next decade and incorporate many of the society's members in its ranks, so that by 1900 there was little to distinguish the two bodies.

The Society of American Artists and American Impressionism

In the following decades, the intimate Tonalist landscape continued to prosper in exhibitions and the marketplace. Notable, however, was the fact that in the society's exhibitions and elsewhere from around 1890 to 1895, French Impressionism would make significant inroads among the landscapists; some Tonalists adopted Impressionist techniques, others held firmly to the tenets of Tonalism, while many evolved a more painterly and expressive style by 1900. Charles de Kay had recognized this phenomenon in his first review of the 1890 Society of American Artists' annual exhibition: "That the sympathies of the leading members of the Society of American Artists go with the later school of French Impressionists is plain enough from the number of paintings more or less touched by the new fashion which have been accepted this year." Impressionist Theodore Robinson won the Webb Prize for landscape in 1890 with a winterscape, while Theodore Wendel, Robert Reid, and even Dwight Tryon, in de Kay's estimation, contributed Impressionist works. De Kay noted that Tryon was, "merely influenced by the modern extremists enough to get what is good out of the movement." De Kay wrote "that the French extremists have won the nickname of "Lentillists" in Paris for the use of colored dabs about the size and shape of a lentil grain. At a distance the lentil-shaped dabs resolve themselves into their proper relations and a fine picture may be the result."[52]

By the time of the 1895 annual exhibition, the American Impressionists had reached their apogee of influence, with Childe Hassam winning the Webb Prize for his *Plaza Central, Havana*. De Kay had been appointed consul general to Berlin by President Grover Cleveland in 1894 (an appointment secured through the Gilders, who were friends of the president), but his successor at the *New York Times* adhered closely to de Kay's artistic dictates. "The seventeenth exhibition of the Society of American Artists has been struck by a great wave of impressionism, which has carried pretty much everything before it . . . a spectacle of much brilliancy, high color, and scintillating effect of light. A closer inspection, however, is somewhat disappointing and reveals lack of purpose in much of the work, other than the mere effort after flippant or unusual color suggestions, which when secured, do not seem worthy of the time expended." The *Times* writer criticized Hassam's prizewinner for its lack of composition or distinguished color. In general, the Impressionist work of 1895, "surpasses any previous years in its rampant, wild schemes of vibrating color, and in its straining after high, light tones, that end too frequently in utter chalkiness. This is achieved, too, at the expense of most of the other qualities that go toward the making of a serious work of art."[53] By 1897 the crisis had passed and the society's exhibition of that year marked "a decided advance on the exhibitions of the last four or five years, in that there is more originality displayed, and a comparatively small number of pictures which are reflections, if not direct copies of the works of the French Impressionists, and which until this year and since 1890 have so largely preponderated in the society's annual displays."[54] The return of the society to its roots in tonal painting may have encouraged a breakaway group of painters, many leaning toward an Impressionist palette, to leave the society in 1898 and form their own exhibition group known as The Ten.

The largely negative response by de Kay and other American critics to French Impressionism in its American guise has often been characterized as reactionary by present-day art historians. In the most part this is unfair. De Kay had a highly sophisticated eye and progressive bent and most of his judgments in terms of quality hold up well over the long term. He was not averse to Impressionism per se, certainly not in the hands of its earliest and best French exponents. His attitude toward American Impressionism derived from the fact that it was imported, showed all the signs of an imitative or degraded style by the 1890s, and was not inherent in the American experience or possessed of deep-rooted American sentiment. De Kay and his contemporaries found Impressionism too experimental, even too scientific in its aims, and its diffuse forms fundamentally lacking in the integrity of compositional structure that gave a picture visual weight and interest. The Tonalist canon of taste—ideality, feeling, poetry, suggestion, illusion, and mystery—was absent. The light, chalky, pastel-like tones might offer a certain sunny sweetness but quickly became cloying, especially in the hands of epigoni. The "violent" vibration of bright color tones, characteristic of chromatic Impressionism, lacked the subtle, refined, and ultimately more mysterious diffused vibration that closely aligned and carefully painted tones produced, as advocated by Birge Harrison in his book on landscape painting.

Harrison wrote that the modern painter had two choices, the first being "the spot and dash method used by the impressionists and their school . . . this system, while giving beautiful results in the way of luminosity, does not logically follow the forms of nature, or reproduce her surfaces, and it must therefore be regarded as an imperfect and a temporary manner which is destined to be superseded in time by some more supple and expressive technique . . . The so-called French impressionists . . . special achievement in art was a purely technical triumph—the discovery that by the use of broken color in its prismatic simplicity the pulsating, vibrating effect of light could be transferred to the surface of a canvas . . . they were somewhat deficient in the quality of personal vision, and their rage to secure the effect of light at all hazards led to a certain monotony of technique which tended to blunt the personal note in their work." From Harrison's perspective, the Tonalist mode, "adopted by the majority of our best landscape painters is one in which vibration is obtained by means of a cool overtone painted freshly into a warm undertone, care being taken not to mix or blend the two coats and not to cover up completely the undertone, rather letting it show through brokenly all over the canvas; the vibration being secured naturally, by the separate play of the warm and the cold notes." Harrison found this method not only logical, for it was based in nature, with the cool overtones of reflected light from the sky falling on the warm overtones, the local colors of the landscape; more important, the Tonalist mode was "supple and responsive," and lent itself "not only to the infinite variations of technique demanded by differing temperament in the artist, but allowing endless latitude. . . . "[55] In effect, for Harrison and de Kay, the Tonalist method allowed the artist to best express his individuality, the fountainhead of all hopes for a national art.

For American critics of de Kay's generation—and for the majority of Tonalist artists—Impressionism was all surface glitter and dazzle, and lacked deep feeling and expressive carrying power, or soul. Tonalists relied less on high Impressionism's analytical eye and more on the inner eye of the imagination (Emerson's transparent eyeball). For those with a Transcendental Romantic sympathy, Impressionism offered little in the way of textural complexity, visual mystery, compositional interest, or symbolic depths. Its sunny disposition gravitated toward the picturesque, to the cosmopolitan and fashionable. As Inness scholar Rachael DeLue has pointed out, Inness took a very negative stance toward Impressionism: "Inness was desperate to distance himself from the impressionist aesthetic because of its emphasis on materiality (rather than soul) and because of what he thought it said about perception and what he thought it did to the eyes; his impressionism was in fact, meant as an antidote to that of Monet and his followers in the United States, and he was deeply troubled by the fact that his paintings could be characterized as furthering the aims and the vision of the impressionist school."[56]

It is one of the great ironies of American art history that in recent decades the American Impressionists have been touted as the bearers of the modernist impulse in American art. Late-nineteenth-century critics like de Kay and painters like Inness and Harrison saw the American Impressionists as falling into a trap similar to what had ensnared the older Hudson River School: a striving after a kind of realistic and objective representation—for bright scintillating sunlight, in the case of the Impressionists—which failed on the level of artistic truth, the abstract and expressive truth that is fundamentally subjective and best received and rendered through the sensitive imagination of the artist. Inness, too, saw a connection between pre-Raphaelitism and Impressionism; though opposites in most respects, both movements relied on a skeptical and scientific "tendency to ignore the unseen. The mistake in each case is the same, namely, that the material is the real."[57] Inness's reverence for the "unseen," influenced by his Swedenborgian beliefs, was part and parcel of the Romantic and ultimately Emersonian Transcendentalist view of creative experience to which the American cultural elite of the period—especially the Gilder circle with its New England orientation and mystic tendencies—passionately adhered. For de Kay, and artists like La Farge, Whistler, and Inness, who were possessed of a spiritual bent and deeply conversant with the old master tradition of tonal construction, the Impressionist experiments were interesting forays—perhaps fool's errands for a bland truth—that led to neither a more propitious artistic future nor a more profound rendering of human visual experience (Monet, realizing this, moved on after 1900 to a more tonal, abstract, subjective, and expressive style).

In a biting criticism of John Ruskin in 1879, whose texts on modern painters had captivated English and Hudson River artists for a generation, de Kay observes Ruskin's many contradictions and notes that the tonal tradition derived from the old masters, which had inspired the likes of Whistler and others, did so precisely because the old masters recognized the folly of trying to approximate with any exactitude the light experienced in nature. "It is hardly worth while to speak of the extreme want of logic in Mr. Ruskin; to point out, for instance, how he continually harps upon the impossibility of painters attempting to rival the tremendous contrasts of nature by employment of a petty gamut of colors, and how on the next page he shows that he does not realize that the old masters painted as they did for the very reason that they had realized so well this impossibility of direct competition between sunlight and pigments."[58] From de Kay's point of view, the Tonalists had rightly forgone any attempt to compete with the Impressionists, choosing a more subjective path of interpreting light rather than dissecting it.

Purchasers of American art in the 1880s and 1890s probably cared little for technical controversies, even if many paid attention to European fashion, but they knew what they liked and they were increasingly enthralled by the quasi-Transcendental Romantic landscape tradition that found its penultimate expression after 1900 in the collecting craze for Tonalists like Ralph Albert Blakelock and Albert Pinkham Ryder, and the near-deified George Inness, Alexander Wyant, George Fuller, and Homer Dodge Martin. For the more aesthetically minded, James McNeill Whistler's deliquescent harmonies remained the ultimate achievement. Surprisingly, the turn-of-the-century market tilted toward the Tonalists, and, oddly enough, in many cases the most expressive, abstract, and mysteriously poetic and symbolic subjects—not to mention difficult and innovative technical renderings—received the majority of sales. Ryder appealed to a very knowledgeable and sophisticated clientele. It is useful to remember, too, that even by 1890, when the American Impressionists began to exhibit in significant numbers, the Impressionist movement in France had already dissolved after its final exhibition in 1886, twelve years after the movement's first exhibition of 1874. Master Impressionists like Monet and Degas would go on to pursue lines of development that had more to do with Whistler's post-Impressionist decorative symbolism and less with the sunny skies and cosmopolitan fare of Manet, Monet, and Renoir at Argenteuil in 1874. Their European followers, like Gauguin, were much more interested in abstracting from nature and creating a synthesis of form and color, often flattening form to create decorative and expressive curves. As will be seen in chapter 8, the Tonalists were pursuing similar modernist strategies and so were not beholden to the bright palette of the Impressionists; Tonalists were interested not so much in the fluid play of light but more in sustaining local color, taking apart and abstracting local tones to express the mood of a moment, or, better still, suspending the moment and removing it from the onrush of time. If anything, the Tonalists were Proustian in their ambitions to recover lost time through memory's eye. The standard Impressionist approach was already retardataire in advanced art circles in Europe of the 1890s (Degas was well on his way to his own brand of Tonalism both in his figurative and landscape work), but retained a residual appeal for American expatriate sophisticates who still admired the early Monet.

The Maturing of the Tonalist Movement and the Triumph of the Society of American Artists

What de Kay valued, as did other progressive voices around the Gilder circle, was expressive, sensuous tonalities manifesting deep feeling. Over and over again in his reviews of the Society of American Artists' exhibitions, de Kay emphasized a similar criterion: "beauty of tone," "lovely in tone," "fine in tone," "charm of tone." In a society retrospective in 1892, the hanging committee again divided the work in terms of tonality, hanging one gallery with the "toned pictures, the other those of vivid colors, which, as a rule, have no surface finish and are suitable to spacious rooms."[59] The low-toned picture gallery contained the works of mostly older members of the society: John La Farge showed both Newport landscapes and figurative works; Homer Dodge Martin, Inness, Chase, Weir, John Singer Sargent (two small Venetian scenes), Edward Simmons, J. Frank Currier, Thomas Eakins, and others were hung in the "Tone Gallery."

While the early to mid-1890s saw the high point of Impressionism in America, it also marked the maturing of the second-generation Tonalists as the first generation faded from the scene; all of the older artists would be dead by 1900, except Whistler who died in 1904 and La Farge who passed away in 1910. The 1891 Society of American Artists' annual exhibition included many of the major Tonalists who would go on to successful careers reaching into the 1920s. Out of a total of 250 works, there were 133 landscapes; Chase was represented by five landscapes, William A. Coffin (winner of the 1891Webb Prize) by five, Charles Warren Eaton by four, and Henry Golden Dearth (*Winter Road*, 1891, fig. 4.23) by three; other rising Tonalists included Bruce Crane, Elliott Daingerfield (*Moonlit Night*, c. 1900, fig. 4.24), Charles Melville Dewey, Frederick W. Kost (*Riverside*, c. 1895, fig. 4.25), Walter Nettleton, Leonard Ochtman, Charles Platt, Henry Ward Ranger, Dwight Tryon, Robert Van Boskerck, Alexander Van Laer, and George Bogert. A year later, in 1892, de Kay noted that the society was making money for its members, surpassing "the sordid money making of the Academy of Design . . . The Academy shows a tendency to fall off, so far as sales are concerned, while the society is having its collective head turned by prosperity. The prosperity it is true, is a relative prosperity. Less than a score of paintings are sold and the total paid for them is about $10,000."[60] In

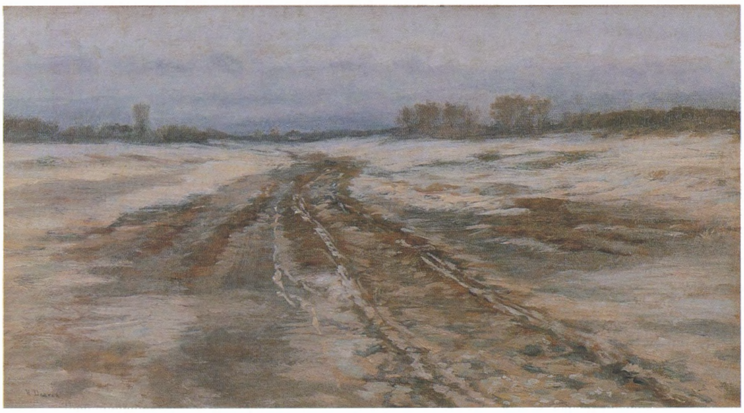


Fig. 4.23. Henry Golden Dearth, *Winter Road*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 16 x 29 in. Private collection.

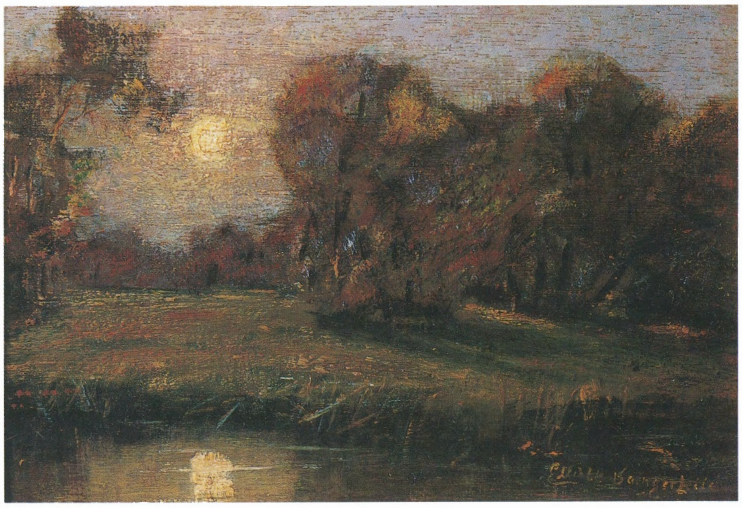


Fig. 4.24. Elliott Daingerfield, *Moonlit Night*, c. 1900. Oil on panel, 4 x 6 in. Private collection.

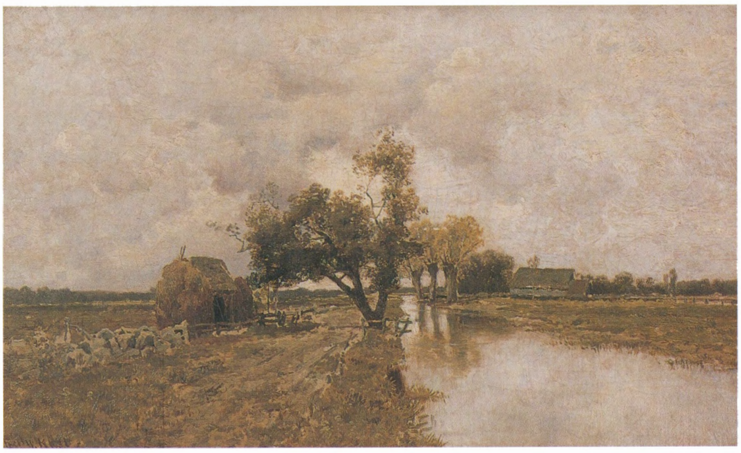


Fig. 4.25. Frederick W. Kost, *Riverside* c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

1892 another New Englander, John Appleton Brown, became a member of the society and contributed some of the finest Tonalist pastels to grace the its exhibition walls. That year, Roger Donoho's Webb Prize–winning landscape sold for $2,500. This relative prosperity was something of a calm before the storm of the economic depression of 1893–97, which would send the New York art world reeling for several years, not to recover fully until 1900, when the market for Tonalism would take off, reaching successive new highs (an Inness traded for $45, 000 in 1917)[61] through the 1920s.

The society was, of course, only a reflection of the American art world, especially market realities, though it was certainly a catalyst for change. Looking back from 1905, the year before the society merged with the National Academy of Design, historian and artist Samuel Isham described the changes the society had wrought on the American art scene. "The work represented the very latest ideals that had swept through the foreign schools and aroused the enthusiasm of the transatlantic students, who were embarrassed by no art traditions whatever, and who were eager to gain distinction in the shortest way. Nor were the ideals alike. At the first the Munich men and the Paris men were in striking contrast, and each year sent back new enthusiasts possessed of a new and infallible viewpoint. Whether it was the tonal picture or the open-air study, the minute realism of Bastien Le Page [*sic*] or the dots of the impressionists, the latest novelty in art appeared promptly on the walls of the society's exhibition, to the pride of the practitioner and the amazement of the simple-minded. In this way the society fulfilled its mission and was a means of enlightenment to many that dwelt in darkness."[62]

By the mid-1880s, the Society of American Artists, and to a lesser extent the National Academy of Design, had absorbed the modernist impulses from abroad, and out of the arena of the exhibitions a fresh and vibrant school of American landscape art emerged that was distinct from landscape work in Europe both in subject and style. The various streams of influence had merged into something close to a national style. William Morris Hunt, John La Farge, George Inness, and to a smaller degree, Alexander Wyant and Homer Dodge Martin had set the stage for an American Tonalist landscape movement. The younger artists back from Munich, Paris, and the American art colonies in Brittany, along with their American-trained colleagues, coalesced along the lines of the older men, adding their distinctive touches. To this mix, Whistler added reinforcement and also led the Tonalist landscape into an entirely modernist direction. But it was the core group of landscapists in the society—Robert Swain Gifford, William Sartain, and Hugh Bolton Jones, and especially Albert Pinkham Ryder, Ralph Albert Blakelock, and J. Francis Murphy—who galvanized critics like Charles de Kay and established a market for the Tonalist landscape. They were soon to be followed by many others, and even the finest figurative artists in the society, including William Merritt Chase, J. Alden Weir, Thomas Dewing, Abbott Thayer, and Kenyon Cox (*After the Harvest* [*Ohio Valley*], 1888, fig. 4.26)—de Kay had unmercifully criticized Cox for his idealized nudes—bowed to market forces and the burgeoning American art scene that favored the production of landscapes.

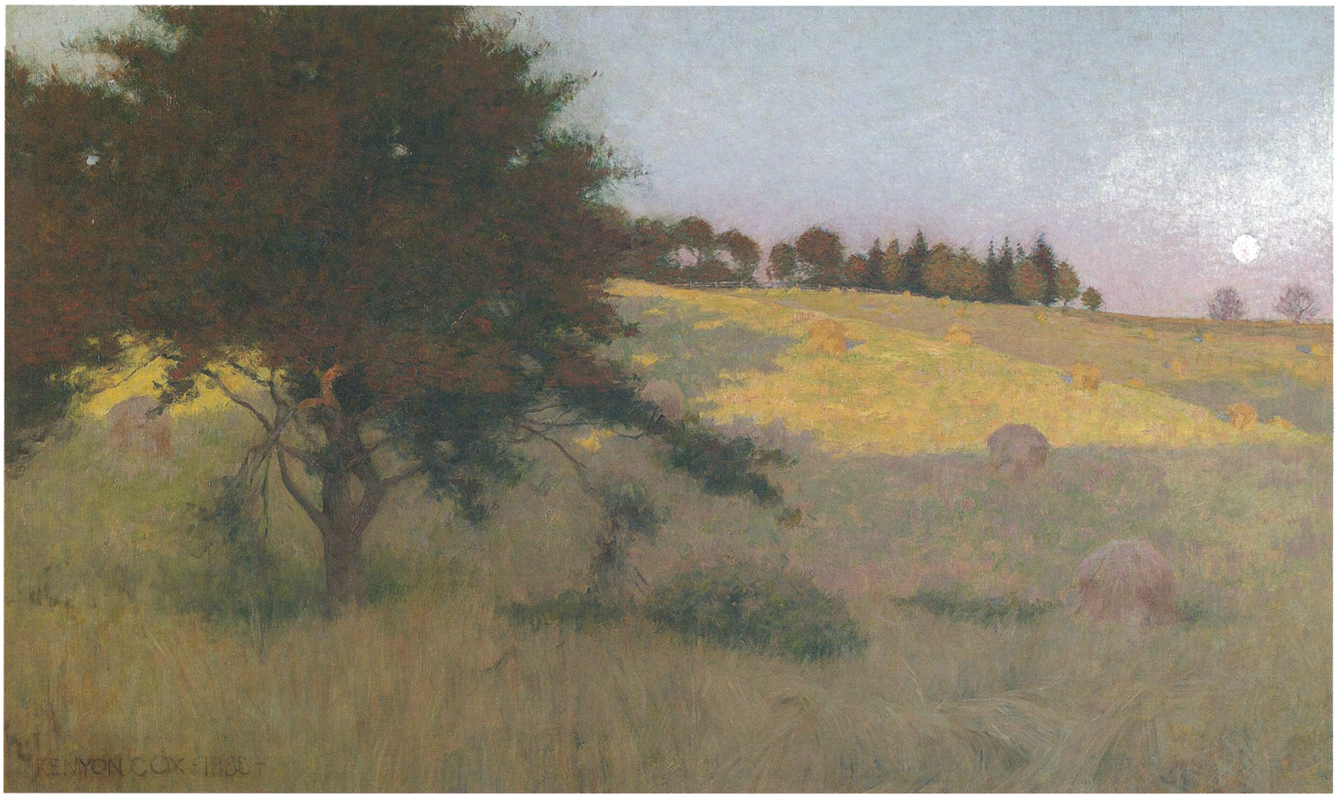


Fig. 4.26. Kenyon Cox, *After the Harvest (Ohio Valley)*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 18 ¼ x 30 ¼ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

Robert Swain Gifford (1840–1905)

Robert Swain Gifford, Hugh Bolton Jones, and William Sartain stand out as stalwart landscapists of the early days of the Society of American Artists, anchoring an allegiance to the landscape genre during the first flurry of enthusiasm for figurative art among the returning painters from Europe. Gifford (fig. 4.27) was the oldest of the three, and unlike Jones and Sartain, who had recently returned from studies in France, was a respected veteran artist in New York art circles by 1878; he had never studied abroad but had traveled widely and so may well have absorbed new ideas along the way. His early studies were with a local painter of seascapes in his hometown of New Bedford on the southeast coast of Massachusetts, and possibly the marine painter William Bradford was an influence, but in most respects Gifford was self-taught. His early success as a painter of the ocean and coastal views and scenes from his travels in Europe and the Middle East were in the Hudson River School mode and tended toward anecdote and straightforward realism. His birth date of 1840 puts him on the cusp of the second-generation Tonalists born between 1840 and 1865, and indeed it was with this generation and the progressive painterly disposition forming in the mid-1870s that Gifford ultimately and enduringly aligned himself.

Considering the artist's New England upbringing, close to Boston and Newport, it is hard to imagine that William Morris Hunt did not play a role in moving Gifford toward a more

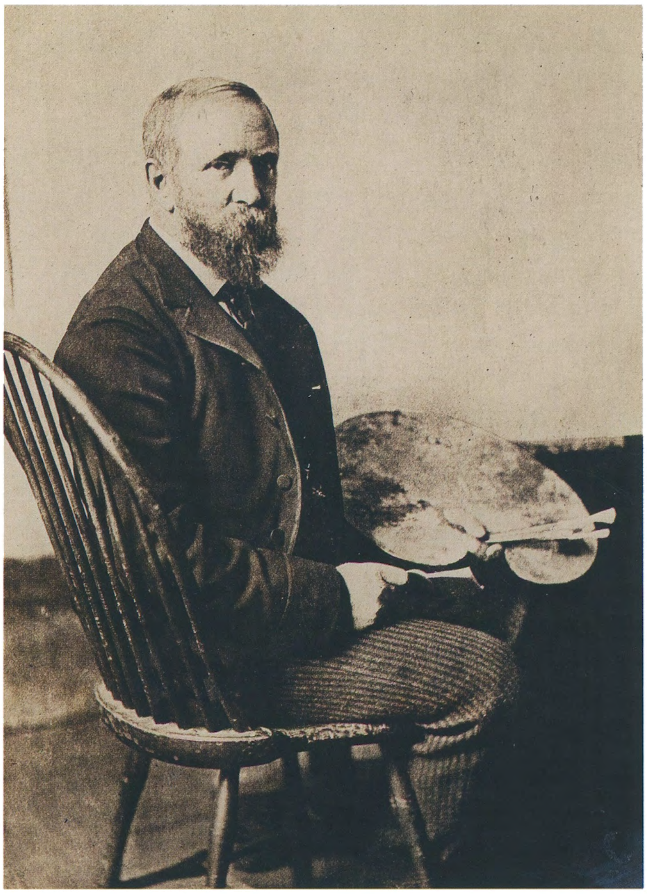


Fig. 4.27. Photograph of Robert Swain Gifford. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1883–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

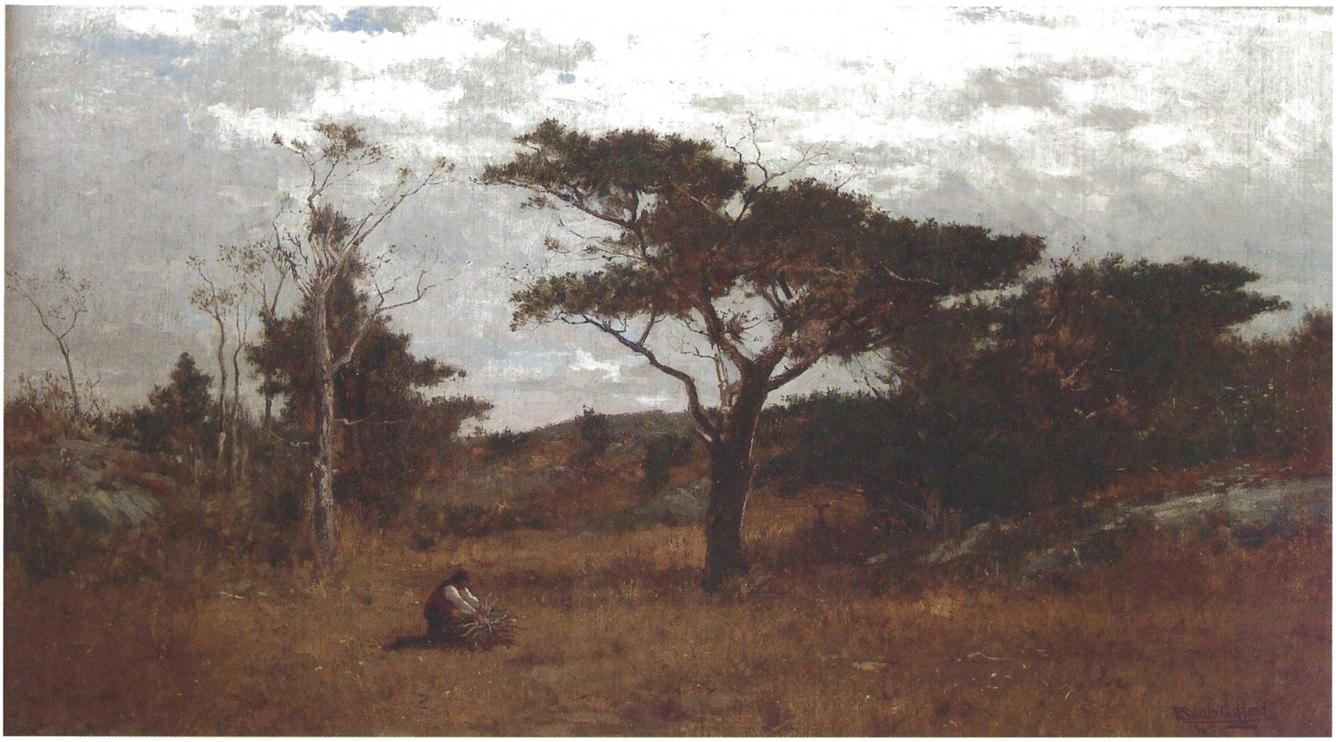


Fig. 4.28. Robert Swain Gifford, *Cedars of New England,* 1876–77. Oil on canvas, 18 x 32 in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

Barbizon style of painting during the 1870s. His medal-winning painting at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, *Cedars of New England*, 1876–77 (fig. 4.28), demonstrates a well-developed feel for graphic form and expressive brushwork, as well as a soft-spoken poetry in depicting his home ground, thoroughly in keeping with Hunt and La Farge. The muted tonalities further emphasize the landscape elements, especially the decorative character of the sea-blown trees and the rock outcroppings emerging from the sere grass. Gifford retained a particular fondness for small gesticulating trees in both his painted and etched landscapes. *Indian Summer*, 1879 (fig. 4.29), again shows how completely Gifford had made the transition by this time to a more painterly, low-toned, and intimate style of landscape. Although a touch of narrative detail persists—and would continue to persist in his later work—in the two foreground figures, the title tells the real story. *Indian Summer* is an evocation of time and place, specifically, the Massachusetts coastline of Buzzards Bay and the offshore islands where Gifford spent his youth. The autumnal ochers and greens would remain staples of his art for the next twenty years, as would a brooding sense of nostalgia for his native ground—and its defunct whaling and salt-gathering industries—that infuses his best works with a haunting expressiveness.

Having spent the early part of his career in the shadow of the Hudson River School, Gifford struggled to expand his chosen repertoire in the glare of the more progressive forces coming into play in the 1880s. Charles de Kay's review of the National Academy exhibition of 1879 singles out Gifford for a dexterous aerial perspective in a beach scene, "rendered with a dignity and poetry that he has not shown conspicuously of late. Mr. Gifford continually tends to uniformity in his work; he is apt to repeat himself, but although the Salters Beach is not a new departure in any sense, it contains in greater force the beauty scattered more thinly through his landscapes of recent years." In the same review, de Kay takes his ire out on one of his favorite whipping boys, Winslow Homer, for weak perspective, and Hudson River men like Thomas Moran for their warhorses of narrative art, in addition to others for their dreary "impression of voyage" to exotic locales—all lacking interest: "But it is waste energy." De Kay notes apropos of Gifford's successful transition to the new stylistic developments: "It is an old story that the movement leading to the foundation of the Students' Art League [*sic*] and the Society of American Artists has profoundly influenced a certain number of the older men who are not so thoroughly wedded to a system of art that change is impossible. In some cases the struggles of Academicians under the unwonted weight of a new idea are amusing; in others they are worthy of our respect. Mr. Gifford may be classed with the later."[63] Whether Gifford had modernized his style of painting on his own terms or not, the critical pressures to do so were inexorable. The following year, 1880, de Kay bestowed his tentative blessing on Gifford's work at the society's exhibition: "One knows just about what to expect of Mr. Gifford, and he is too thorough and workmanlike an artist to disappoint one . . . "; his paintings "are of small size, but contain his well known qualities of restrained sentiment and like for subdued color."[64]

Tupelos on Red Beach, Naushon, 1881 (fig. 4.30), goes to the heart of Gifford's gifts for stark and telling landscape poetics

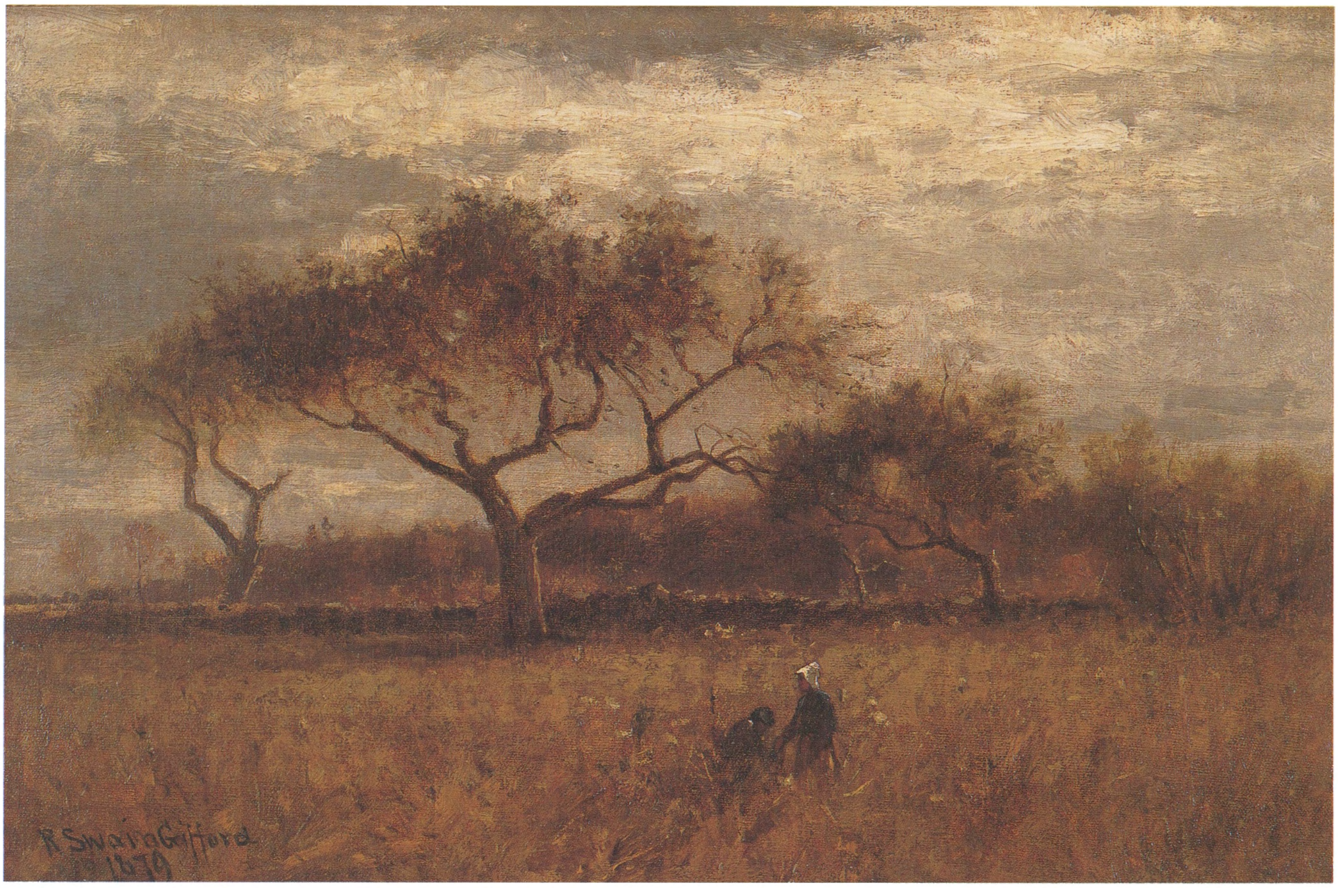


Fig. 4.29. Robert Swain Gifford, *Indian Summer*, 1879. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Private collection.

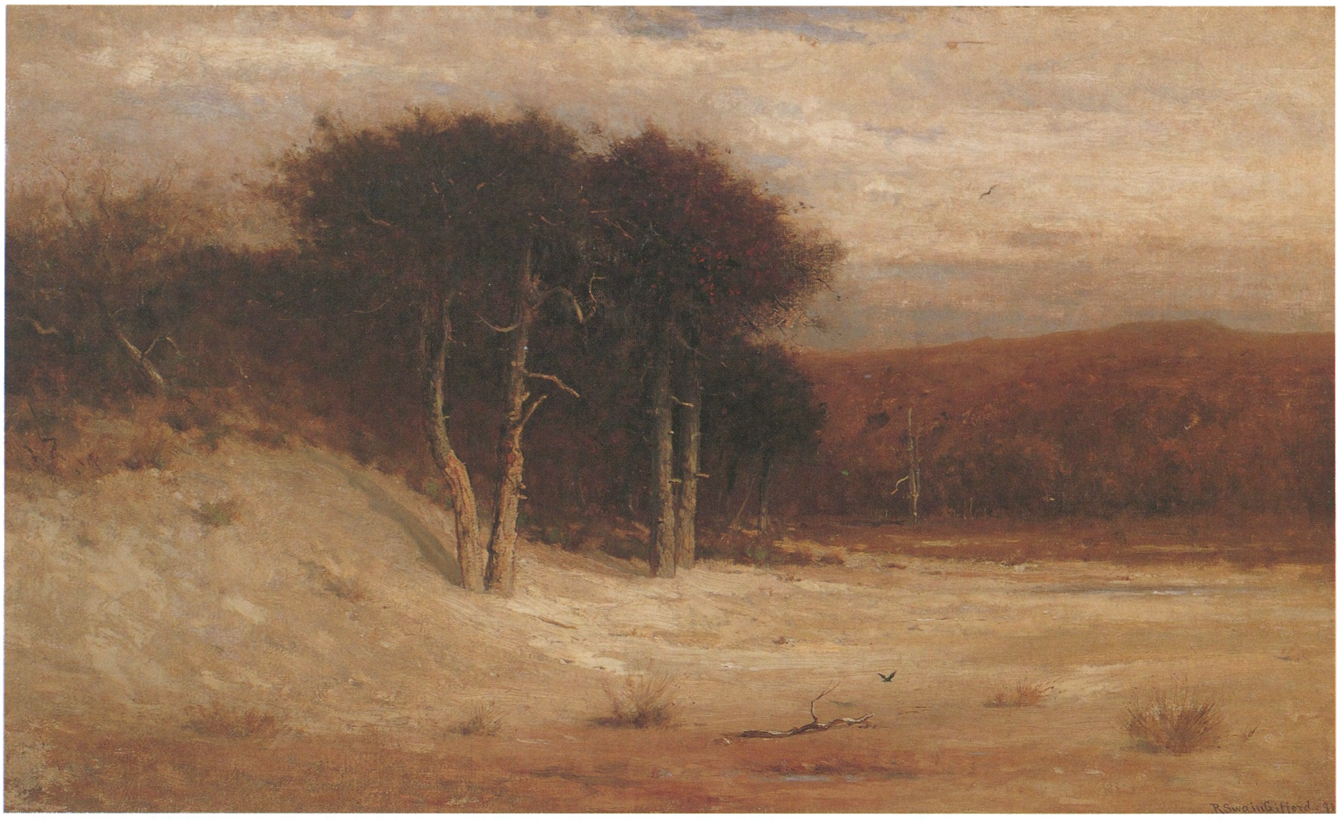


Fig. 4.30. Robert Swain Gifford, *Tupelos on Red Beach*, *Naushon*, 1881. Oil on canvas, 24 x 40 in. Private collection.

and "restrained sentiment" admired by de Kay. Red Beach was located on Naushon Island, just off the mainland near Buzzards Bay and the town of Woods Hole. Gifford was born on the tiny nearby island of Nonamesset (a rough current prevented his mother from getting to the mainland and a doctor for the delivery). Naushon was not simply an evocative landscape near Gifford's childhood home but a place haunted by the artist's namesake, Robert Swain, the son of his father's employer, who died tragically at the age of twenty. Gifford had been named after the young man and remained close to his wealthy mother until her death. The young Robert Swain had been of an artistic disposition and loved wandering on Naushon Island, where he was finally buried. The brooding simplicity of *Tupelos on Red Beach, Naushon,* "subdued in color" and sparse of vegetation, speaks to a very private reverie. Even in such a minimalist scene, remarkable for a painter who emerged from the Hudson River School era, the sumptuous passages of paint and expressive brushstrokes resonate visually, even if the force of its beauty, as de Kay noted, is sometimes thinly scattered. In a death-haunted age (of Gifford's ten brothers and sisters, only three survived childhood), Gifford's windswept imagery of coastlines and beaches where shrubs and small trees cling tenaciously to the earth touched a chord—the sense of a seafaring culture surviving against the odds.

Gifford was probably the finest Tonalist etcher of his day (see fig. 5.69), turning out hundreds of evocative prints, along with a very strong body of watercolors. His work can be grouped with La Farge and Homer Dodge Martin's Newport landscapes, and with the work of inspired young Tonalist landscapists like Charles Warren Eaton who were making their way up the professional ranks in the 1880s. Gifford taught at The Cooper Union in New York City for many years, leaving an indelible mark on a generation of students.

Hugh Bolton Jones (1848–1927)

Hugh Bolton Jones, eight years younger than Robert Swain Gifford, shared a similar developmental arc in that he began early in his career to paint under the influence of the Hudson River School. The precocious native of Baltimore studied art, first at the Maryland Institute, and then in New York at the tender age of seventeen with Horace Walcott Robbins Jr. By 1867, Jones was exhibiting his first canvases in the style of the Hudson River School at the National Academy Design, a style he employed for another ten years until he went to France in 1876 with his younger brother, Francis Coates Jones, to study art. It is notable that Hugh seems to have spent the majority of his four years in France at the American art colony of Pont-Aven in Brittany (with a trip to Tangier, and later Italy, Belgium, France, and Switzerland in 1878), while his brother Francis (Frank) studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris with Bouguereau and Lefebvre. These divergent student experiences resulted in quite dramatic differences between the painting styles of the brothers, who kept a joint studio when they returned to New York. Francis Coates Jones became predominantly a figurative painter; his elegantly conceived landscapes (see fig. 3.54) retain a distinctly academic feel for nuances of detail, compared to Hugh's more broadly painted and expressive canvases. Hugh Bolton Jones represents something of a rarity of the period: a Hudson River School–style landscapist whose work was modified mainly by his experience of the American art colony in Brittany, most likely by the examples of Alexander Harrison, Birge Harrison, Arthur Bridgman, and Jules Bastien-Lepage, as well as by the pearly gray light of the Breton coastal landscape. Like so many of his expatriate countrymen, Jones re-exported this hybrid American-Breton style of plein-air landscape, with its silver-hued tonalities and lush, full-bodied brushwork, back to America, there translating it to the American scene.

On his return to New York in 1880, Jones moved quickly into prominent roles in the art world, gaining membership in both the progressive Society of American Artists and the older National Academy of Design, where he retained long-standing connections from his early days. Like Robert Swain Gifford, Jones seems to have bridged the politics of both institutions effortlessly and, also like Gifford, transitioned to a more progressive tonal style that retained residual hints of a finicky love of detail in his tree forms, while expressing a deep surrender to nature's moods, especially in the 1880s when his landscapes tend to be dark and brooding renditions of overcast days in autumnal guise. *Early Autumn, New England,* 1880 (fig. 4.31), fully displays Jones's post-European transition to a tonal style. Something of the soft atmospherics of Brittany remains, along with a painterly feeling for the rich greens of the New England landscape and the rugged outcroppings along an old cart track, not dissimilar to the Breton work of Alexander and Birge Harrison at this time. But the decorative organization of the composition, the soft-edged animated boughs, and the way in which the warm ground of the panel is allowed to bleed through to provide both unity and harmony, is very much in keeping with the Whistlerian aesthetic that was strong at the Art Students League and the Society of American Artists in the early 1880s.

An interest in seasonal color and the nuances of atmospheric effects remained central to Jones's art, as does the focus on the abandoned farms and pastures of New England: a bedrock patrimony in the minds of Americans after the Civil War. As the years passed, Jones's landscapes tended to become sunnier and greens richer, but they never lost a sense of nostalgia or a palpable feel for the hidden essences constant in the natural world. By almost any measure, the artist's reputation and influence between 1880 and 1905 was significant; he received high prices for his landscapes and won medals at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in both 1889 and 1900, and the Webb Prize

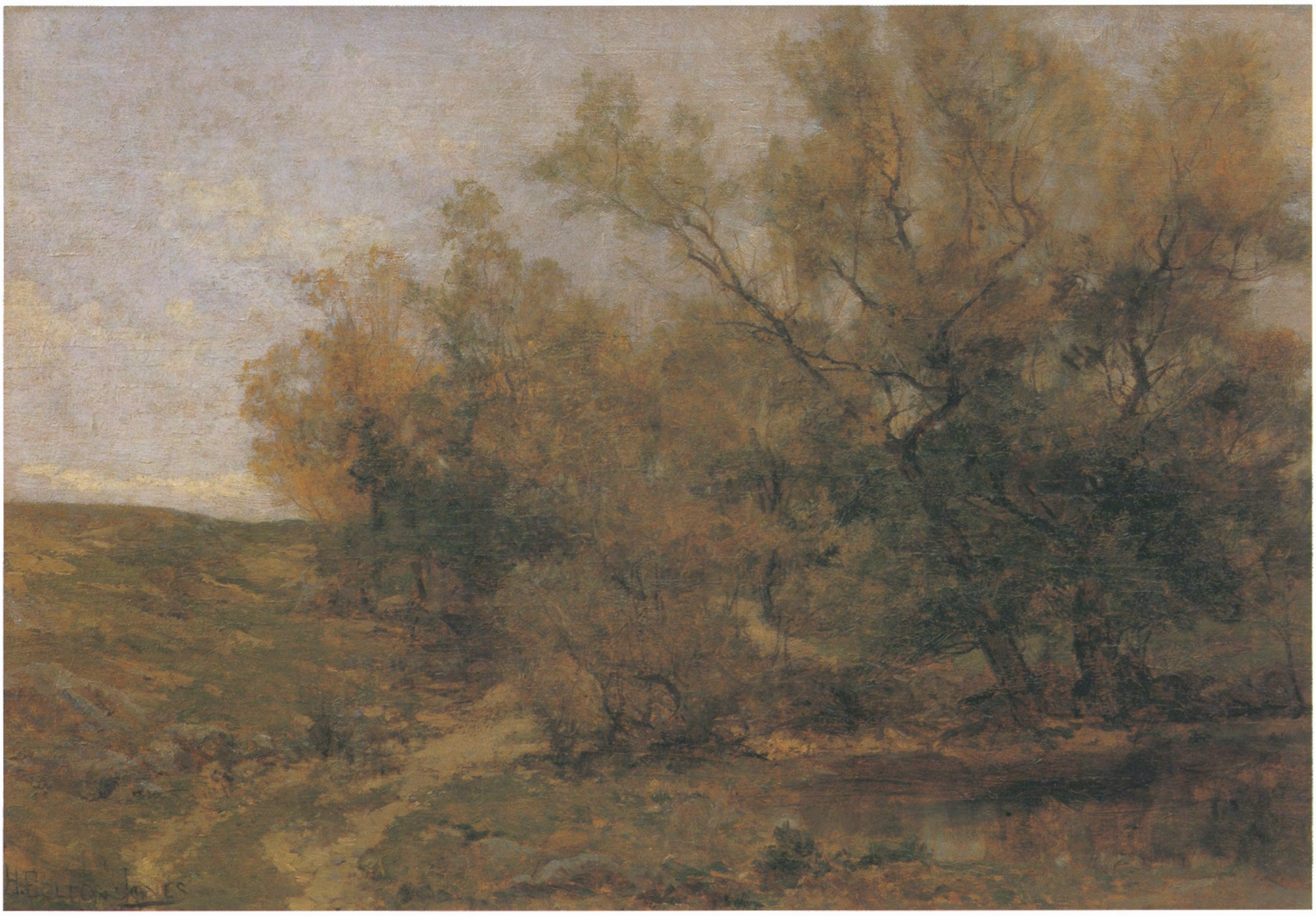


Fig. 4.31. Hugh Bolton Jones, *Early Autumn, New England*, 1880. Oil on panel, 14 x 20 in. Private collection.

for landscapes at the Society of American Artists in 1902, causing the *New York Times* (probably Charles de Kay) to note: "Early Spring by Bolton Jones, which takes the Webb prize, and worthily, for it is a signal triumph in style over many of the former landscapes by this painter—brilliant and luminous, is also easy of brushwork."[65] De Kay had not always been so complimentary of Jones and in the 1880s had often described his work as up and down in merit, metallic, or like a chromolithograph. Jones's brittle tree forms and often dark and relatively monochromatic tonalities may not always have appealed to de Kay; it may have been a little too hard-edged for the critic who promoted a softer-edged Tonalism. Also Jones maintained a relatively straightforward compositional structure of broad horizontals, and may have painted more plein-air work than many of his Tonalist contemporaries, who came increasingly under the sway of Whistler and the Aesthetic movement where they gravitated toward studio-generated synthetic compositions and flattened, decorative Japanese-style designs.

An early Tonalist work like *River View*, circa 1880 (fig. 4.32), which Jones probably painted in the years after his return from Brittany, possibly near his country house in South Egremont, Massachusetts, in the southern Berkshires, displays the artist's sumptuous paint handling and soft tonalities, seeming translated full blown from his experience in Brittany and its atmospheric envelope of silvery-gray air. Signs of his early fondness for detailed renditions of the foreground grasses and plants are still present, while the subtle tonal transitions merge even his most detailed forms into an overall harmony that resonates with singular emotion. Another early landscape, *Twilight*, circa 1885 (fig. 4.33), incorporates all the subtle design elements and exquisite patterning—both in landscape features and in the surface display of passages of pigment—that characterized Aesthetic Tonalism in the late 1880s. A supersensible equilibrium permeates the work as a whole. Here the absence of strong light results in the blurring and softening of forms, inhibiting the perception of three-dimensional recession in space; the landscape forms tend to move closer to the surface plane and arrange themselves in broad silhouette, reading as flattened masses of tone. The bravura brushwork in the sky shows itself as just that: surface decoration with impasto scumbled and laid in with lustrous strokes, appealing very much as pure painting. The mood of late fall, where only the conifers retain foliage, communicates meditative feeling along the lines of the "melting moods" William James wrote about in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*: moments of heightened awareness brought about by moments of

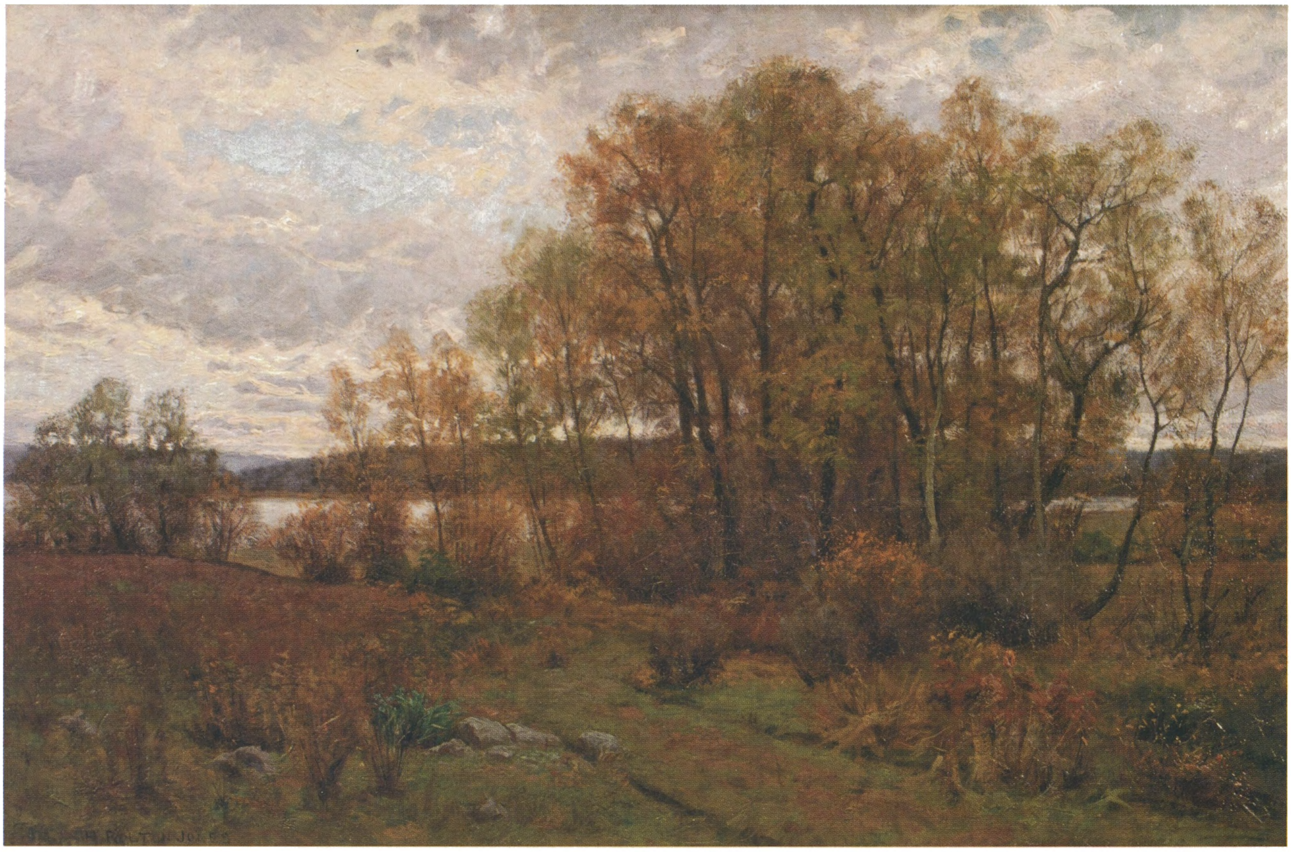


Fig. 4.32. Hugh Bolton Jones, *River View*, c. 1880. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Private collection.

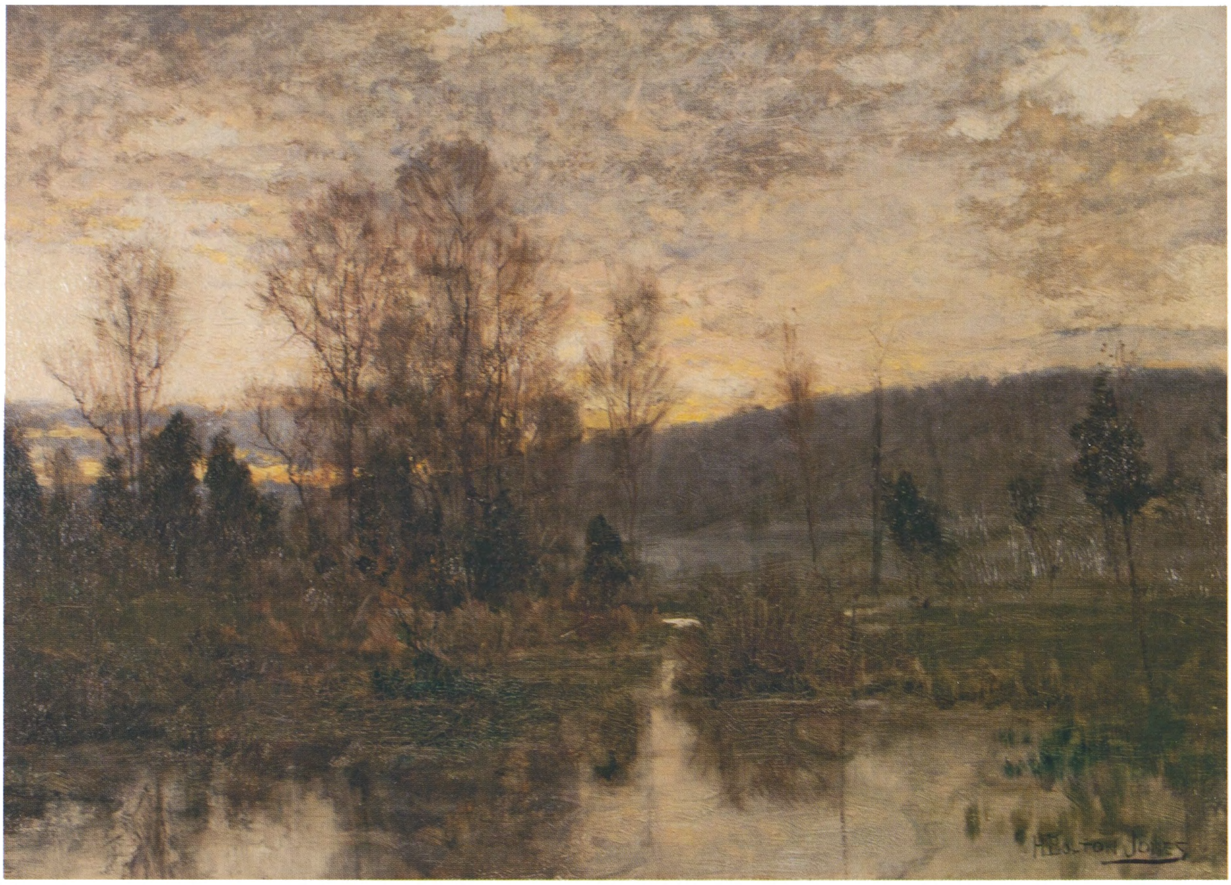


Fig. 4.33. Hugh Bolton Jones, *Twilight*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

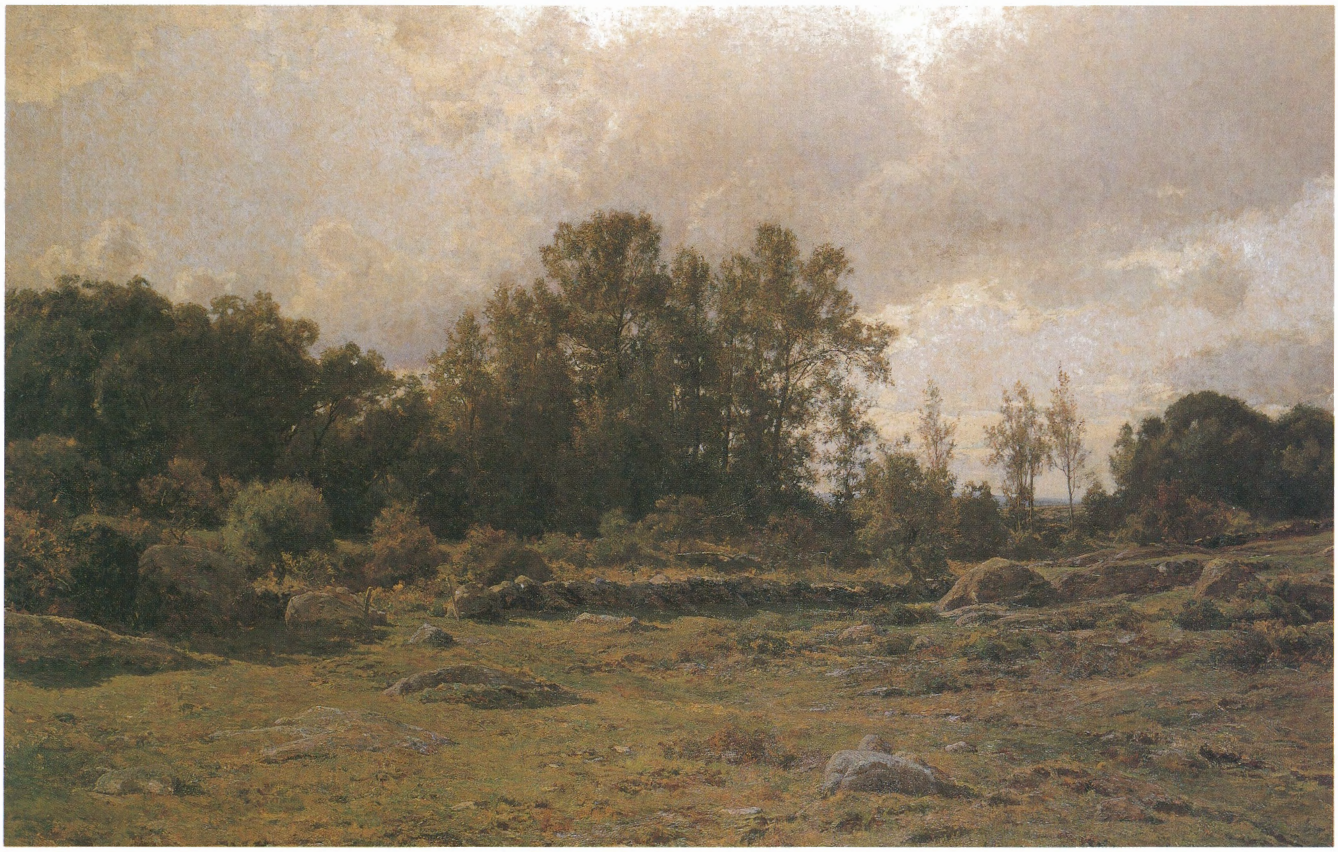


Fig. 4.34. Hugh Bolton Jones, *The Old Pasture*, c. 1889. Oil on canvas, 39 x 60 in. Courtesy Garzoli Gallery, San Rafael, CA.

transcendent emotion. The 1880s, in particular, seemed to be years of sustained and introspective inspiration for Jones. By the 1890s this youthful ardor had broadened into more matter-of-fact renderings of place, more brightly lit and with bewitching spring and summer greens, but lacking the earlier piquancy. *The Old Pasture*, circa 1888 (fig. 4.34), won a medal at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1889. It is an iconic rendition of a Tonalist subject—the overgrown pasture surrounded by crumbling stone walls—and by any measure, a tour de force of technical virtuosity.

William Sartain (1843–1924)

William Sartain (fig. 4.35) is a fascinating example of a meticulously trained academic figurative painter much in the mold of his close friend and Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts colleague Thomas Eakins, who by force of circumstance took up the nearby American landscape and made it the subject of his finest work. A scion of a long-established Philadelphia artistic family, Sartain went to study art in Paris in 1869 with Eakins, remaining until 1875. Sartain studied with Leon Bonnat and at the École des Beaux-Arts and became adept at figurative subjects set in exotic locales like Venice, Spain, and Algiers. He might well have followed the same path as Eakins as an extraordinary figurative artist if a complicated relationship with his father, an engraver in Philadelphia—

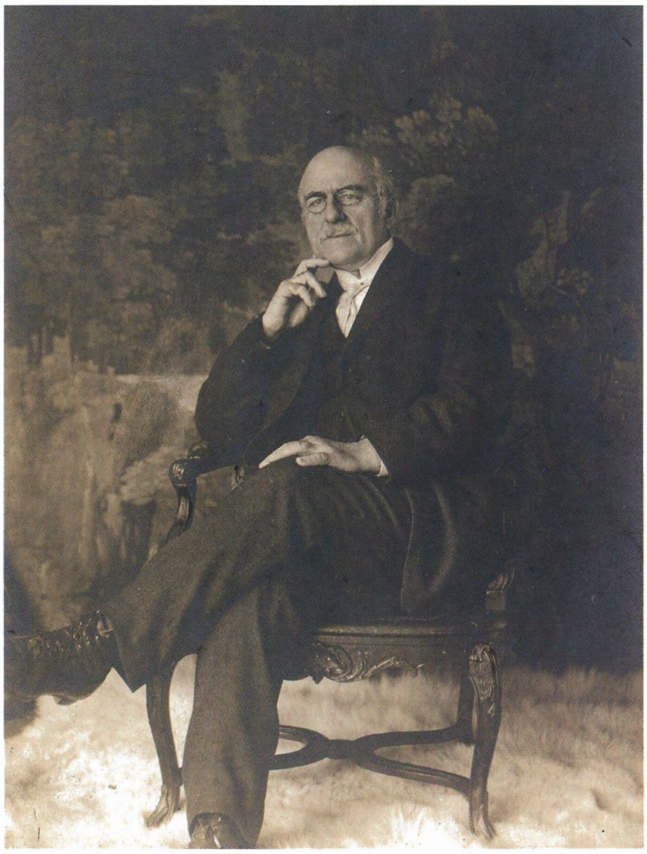


Fig. 4.35. Photograph of William Sartain, c. 1920. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

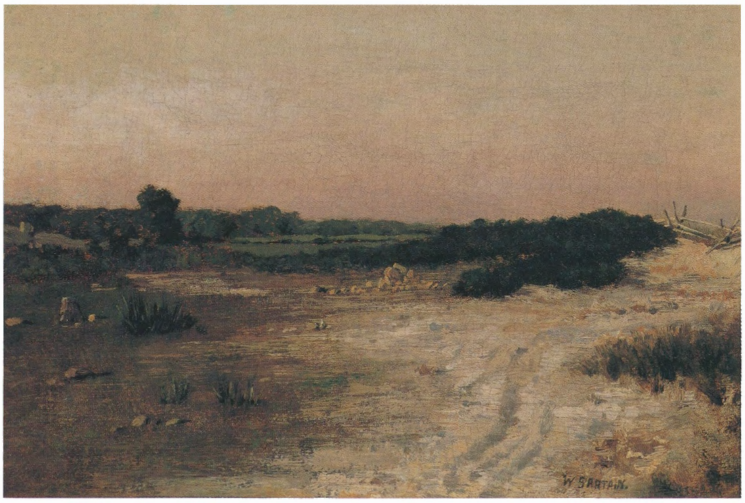


Fig. 4.36. William Sartain, *Road to the Shore*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 10 x 16 in. Private collection.

John Sartain refused to allow his son's works into the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition—had not prompted William's move to New York, where he established himself as a leading light on the teaching staff of the Art Students League and as a founding member of the Society of American Artists. His fellow instructor at the league, Thomas Dewing, may have encouraged Sartain to embrace a more decorative mode of composition in the manner of the Aesthetic movement. Once in New York, Sartain came under withering pressure from Charles de Kay and the growing momentum of the Tonalist movement to move away from figurative art and try his hand at delicate landscapes. In the 1879 society annual exhibition, de Kay excoriated Sartain, in contrast to Duveneck, for lack of imagination: "... the pictures of Mr. Sartain, of Philadelphia.... are most poverty-stricken affairs in that respect, and whether they are portraits of models in Arab head-gear, interiors of bazaars, or what not, they all exhibit a very youthful and jejune period of art, which it may be hoped that time will correct."[66] These remarks are typical of de Kay's disparagement of exotic Orientalism and of derivative European styles in general, in his constant campaigning for restrained all-American sentiment. Three years later, Sartain had heeded de Kay's call and the critic wrote: "... in 'Sandylands Near the Sea,' in which Mr. Sartain has rid himself of the peculiar amber color-tones that are not natural to him, but assimilated from others, he proves himself an excellent landscape painter."[67]

Road to the Shore, circa 1885 (fig. 4.36), displays the brilliant turn Sartain made in the early 1880s toward small, private, and exquisite renditions of the coastal areas of Nonquitt, Massachusetts, and Manasquan along the New Jersey shore, where the artist spent his summers and weekends. *Road to the Shore* displays all the dexterity of Thomas Eakins, and shows Sartain's long academic training, both at the Pennsylvania Academy and in the Paris ateliers. But here the emphasis on exacting detail has been turned to a broader, lusher, and more expressive painterliness. Natural tone, atmospheric tone, draws the disparate elements of the landscape into a harmonious whole, while endowing the place with the feeling of the known and habitual: de Kay's restrained sentiment is firmly in place. The barest touches of highlights in the sand grasses and the split-rail fence add graceful notes of realism to what otherwise is pure landscape poetics.

Sartain's experience in the early years of the society was similar to many of his foreign-trained confederates who began their careers in America touting their figurative credentials only to find that the critics and, increasingly, the art-buying public were deserting them for the landscapists. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, Sartain was asking a thousand dollars and up for his Orientalist subjects, but in the course of the 1880s these subjects faded in frequency of occurrence and were replaced by landscapes, first selling in the low hundreds and then steadily rising, until by 1895 Sartain priced a Manasquan beach scene at a thousand dollars. Hiss colleagues at the Art Students League like William Merritt Chase and Thomas Dewing would also turn to landscapes in these years, as did many of Sartain's students—Charles Warren Eaton being one of the most prominent—in his life classes at the league.

Although Sartain continued to paint exotic figurative work for the remainder of his career, it was his intimate landscapes of shoreline and marsh that seem to have kept him in front of the public, especially after 1892 when he became one of a number of important landscape painters in the fold of the Macbeth Gallery. *Meadows at Mannasquan*, circa 1900 (fig. 4.37), is a lush, simplified, and decorative composition, showing the influence of the Aesthetic movement on Sartain's late landscape work. A reviewer (probably de Kay) of a 1905 Macbeth Gallery exhibition of Sartain's work noted the inherent reticence of the artist's mode, praising him for his repressed color, his

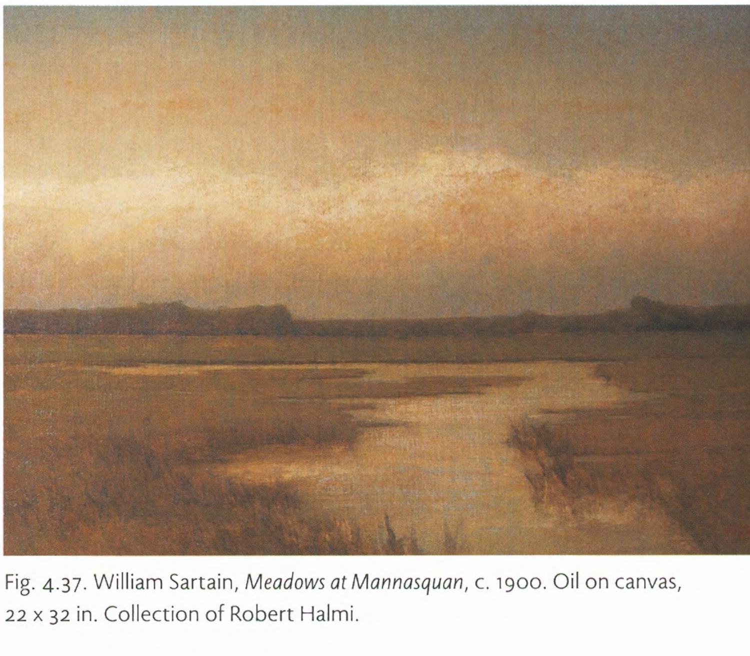


Fig. 4.37. William Sartain, *Meadows at Mannasquan*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 22 x 32 in. Collection of Robert Halmi.

lights veiled to evoke the vapor of sea and shore: "Mr. Sartain does not see Nature in her sportive moods; he neither tries to reproduce the hot noontide nor the fluttering tenderness of Spring, nor the pomp and gayety of our American Fall; his way of looking at the landscape is austere. He is a very Quaker in tones and loves the broad, smooth, browns, the grays, the drab-colored sketches of moorlands, the pale yellowish-brown sweeps of the sand dunes by the sea. One thinks of the late Swain Gifford . . . on the strength of a general harmoniousness of tone."[68] At the height of the Tonalist movement, Sartain was painting deliquescent, soft-edged landscapes with both a Whistlerlian penchant for design and veiled effects, and the kind of brooding solitude found in Robert Swain Gifford's minimalist shorelines.

The Developing Market for Tonalist Landscapes and the Plight of the Figurative Artist, 1880–1900

Even with the critical success of the Society of American Artists, the financial realities for American artists were precarious. The rise of the Tonalist landscape occurred in spite of the often dismal market for American art in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Reviewing the hardships of the artistic life from the vantage point of 1905, Samuel Isham, who was a portraitist as well as a member of the Society of American Artists, wrote of the miserable state of affairs decades before when well-to-do Americans, especially those up-to-date on the newest tendencies, either bought European paintings or photographs of the old masters. "When the 'younger' men went abroad to study, painting was a lucrative profession; when they returned, they found that it was not possible for a man to live by it, even if he were talented, well taught, and hard working. Hardly one succeeded in supporting himself by painting, and the rare exceptions were mostly portrait painters."[69] Of the art public fed on the latest art movements in the new magazines, *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, and *The Century*, Isham continued that they were more interested in the anecdotal and emotional side of the art scene than in the art itself. "They felt that they 'ought to be able to talk about art' . . . They were eager to learn the details of artist life, they rejoiced in the articles descriptive of the meetings and excursions of the Tile Club, they strove to take the artist's standpoint, admiring the slightest sketches that showed any technical quality; they wanted instruction, lectures, articles in the magazines, illustrations, but there their desires stopped. They did not want American paintings. Those who had much money to spend bought foreign work, those who had little contented themselves with photographs of it, and the American painters were encouraged to write about their art or teach it, or even to exhibit it, but rarely to sell it."[70]

Will Low, a figurative artist, illustrator, and muralist, and founding member of the society, who spent five years studying in Paris, had struggled terribly when he returned to New York in 1878. "But by far the most disconcerting condition that I met was the fact that, having spent these five years in acquiring some notion of the art of painting, there was not the slightest discoverable desire on the part of my compatriots to encourage me to paint, nor even permit me to do so, by purchasing my work. In this I shared the misfortune of my comrades newly returned from abroad like myself . . . in the society exhibitions it was notorious that no one sold anything; we were popularly supposed to be producing art for art's sake, and we were left entirely alone to that delightful occupation."[71] Low suffered not only from the European competition in his field but also (with excruciating irony) because he was often dismissed as a painter corrupted by the taint of too much European training and had thus forfeited his American "originality." Scorned even by the magazine editors who commissioned illustrations, he sequestered himself on Nantucket for two years in the hope that the authentic life of the islanders might somehow give a more genuine American tone to his work. Sadly, he could not shake his European training and his idealized figurative work condemned him to the rolls of the forgotten artists of the age.

The situation of the landscapists was a different matter. George Inness, in an interview in 1894 just before his death, recalled that in his early days, in order to survive, he had to travel to Europe to paint foreign scenes for American buyers abroad. "Americans are afraid to admire an example of native art. This is more especially true at home. I did well when abroad from Americans who came there. I never could make a living in my own country."[72] Inness indulged in some retrospective exaggeration, since from the early 1880s, when he bought his house and studio in Montclair, New Jersey, dealers and collectors had flocked to buy his paintings. But like Isham and Low and so many American artists, Inness disparaged the European competition, noting in 1878, "Our country is flooded with the mercantile imbecilities of Verboeckhoven and hundreds of other European artists whose very names are a detestation to any lover of truth. The skin-deep beauties of Bouguereau and others of whom he is a type are a loathing to those who hate the idolatry which worships waxen images."[73] Some fifteen years later in 1894, Inness was still fuming about the French competition and the cachet a foreign name retained for American buyers. "To obtain recognition, however, it must be French. Of the many pictures the French send over here I have seen nothing very good. Of Cazin, whom the Americans are now fussing about, I have seen nothing remarkable, though some pretty pictures."[74]

Homer Dodge Martin had a difficult time selling his work in the 1880s and early 1890s, but Alexander Wyant did reasonably well with his innovative Catskills landscapes. Younger landscapists who were rising during this period, like J. Francis Murphy, Charles Warren Eaton (*Rocks on the Shore*, c. 1895, fig. 4.38),

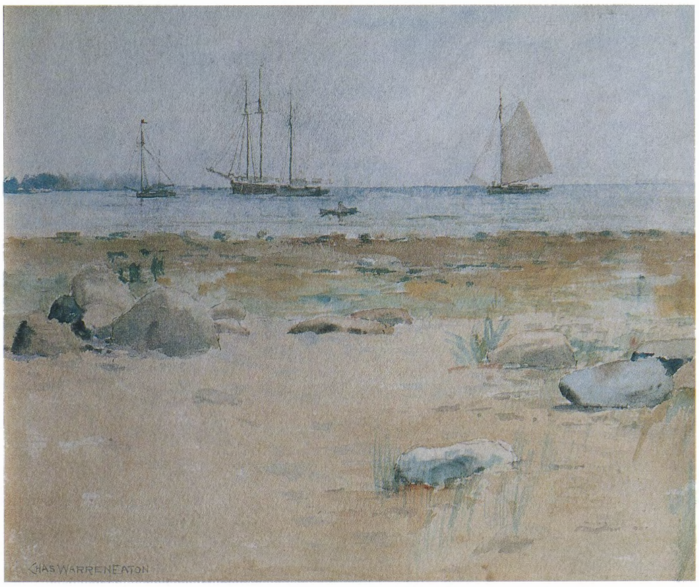


Fig. 4.38. Charles Warren Eaton, *Rocks on the Shore*, c. 1895. Watercolor, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

Leonard Ochtman, Charles Melville Dewey, and William Gedney Bunce, did well enough to support themselves, taking advantage of the burgeoning market for watercolors to tide them over. All these artists suffered in the depression of the 1890s, however, especially Ralph Albert Blakelock, when many of them painted potboilers or small and cheap signature-style examples for the market. Even the most established portrait and genre painters were forced to teach to make ends meet. William Merritt Chase, James Carroll Beckwith, and Thomas Dewing taught at the Art Students League. Chase taught throughout his career—he had a large and growing family to support—and was forced, like many artists, to engage in marketing schemes to move his work. In the 1880s, Chase maintained a studio full of exotic memorabilia, dazzling antique bronzes, and sumptuous tapestries to awe his patrons when they stopped by his Tenth Street studio. The wooing of well-heeled potential patrons and clients with tea receptions and studio visits was a well-established part of the marketing efforts by "society" painters, those either dependent on portraits or sales of genre works.

By the 1890s, when more exhibition venues and commercial galleries became available to American artists, this approach began to fade. Chase, too, turned to small landscapes in the late 1880s; they were popular sellers, surprisingly so since many were innovative along Whistlerian lines. John Henry Twachtman (*Brook near Cincinnati*, c. 1887, fig. 4.39) perennially suffered from poor sales—he rarely bowed to market realities and painted few potboilers—and was obliged to teach throughout his career. Homer Dodge Martin, after forsaking his early Hudson River School style, was often condemned to fall back on illustration—which he detested—and a few sympathetic patrons (including John La Farge and his friends at the Century Club, as well as his long-suffering and loyal wife) to support him and the creation of his last masterpieces. La Farge largely gave up landscape painting after the 1860s and focused more on his stained-glass business, although he would continue to produce brilliant landscape watercolors to the end of his career—his Japanese and South Seas subjects selling for high prices in Boston in the 1890s. J. Frank Currier sold almost none of his Polling watercolors in his pathbreaking exhibition at the American Watercolor Society of 1879. Whistler struggled until the late 1880s (mainly living off his portraits), when his Nocturnes, pastels, and etchings began selling and his market in America began a precipitous rise. For the younger landscape artists, George Inness, and to a lesser extent, Robert Swain Gifford, Alexander Wyant, Whistler, and George Fuller of the older generation, provided a model of financial viability. Inness had long been famous and a recognized master to younger artists like Charles Warren Eaton (*Snow Banks*, 1888, fig. 4.40), who repeatedly visited his 1884 retrospective, which was a revelation to many and began Inness's precipitous rise to national stardom. By the mid-1880s, Inness was able to enjoy the stability and success that had long eluded him. His example as a Tonalist landscapist, both as a master of his craft and one who earned a well-deserved livelihood selling tonal landscapes, was an inspiration—and a market indicator—to many younger artists.

On the broadest market level, the eventual success of the Tonalist movement was the result of the enduring American taste for landscape. Portraits remained in demand—though photography also made inroads into that long-standing market, but figurative art was always problematic. In a residually puritanical culture, pure figure painting, especially easel paintings of the nude, never found a ready market outside utterly idealized and sentimental versions, while sensuous and realistic female nudes rarely found a place beyond the men's barroom, or the dark parlors and bedrooms of the moneyed elite, who, in their snobbish attraction to European artists of renown, often scorned the American version. Will Low noted in his memoirs that his French colleagues, much to their chagrin and delight, thrived on the American market for what amounted to a lightly tarted-up style. Much that passed for figurative work, nude or otherwise, verged on the sentimental or insipid; Charles de Kay, for one, was often ruthless in pointing out the inconsistencies of style and subject in figurative work. True sentiment in landscape was to be encouraged, but sentimentality in all its guises was scorned by de Kay and his circle. Even worse were the European inanities that flooded the U.S. market; Inness railed against imported figurative works: "It seems to me, moreover, that thousands of fashionable imported figure-pieces, in which laces and furbelows direct attention to forbidden charms by concealing them, are scarcely less objectionable. You know the canvases that I mean. They come from France, from Spain, from Italy, and adorn hundreds of parlours in every city in Christendom."[75]

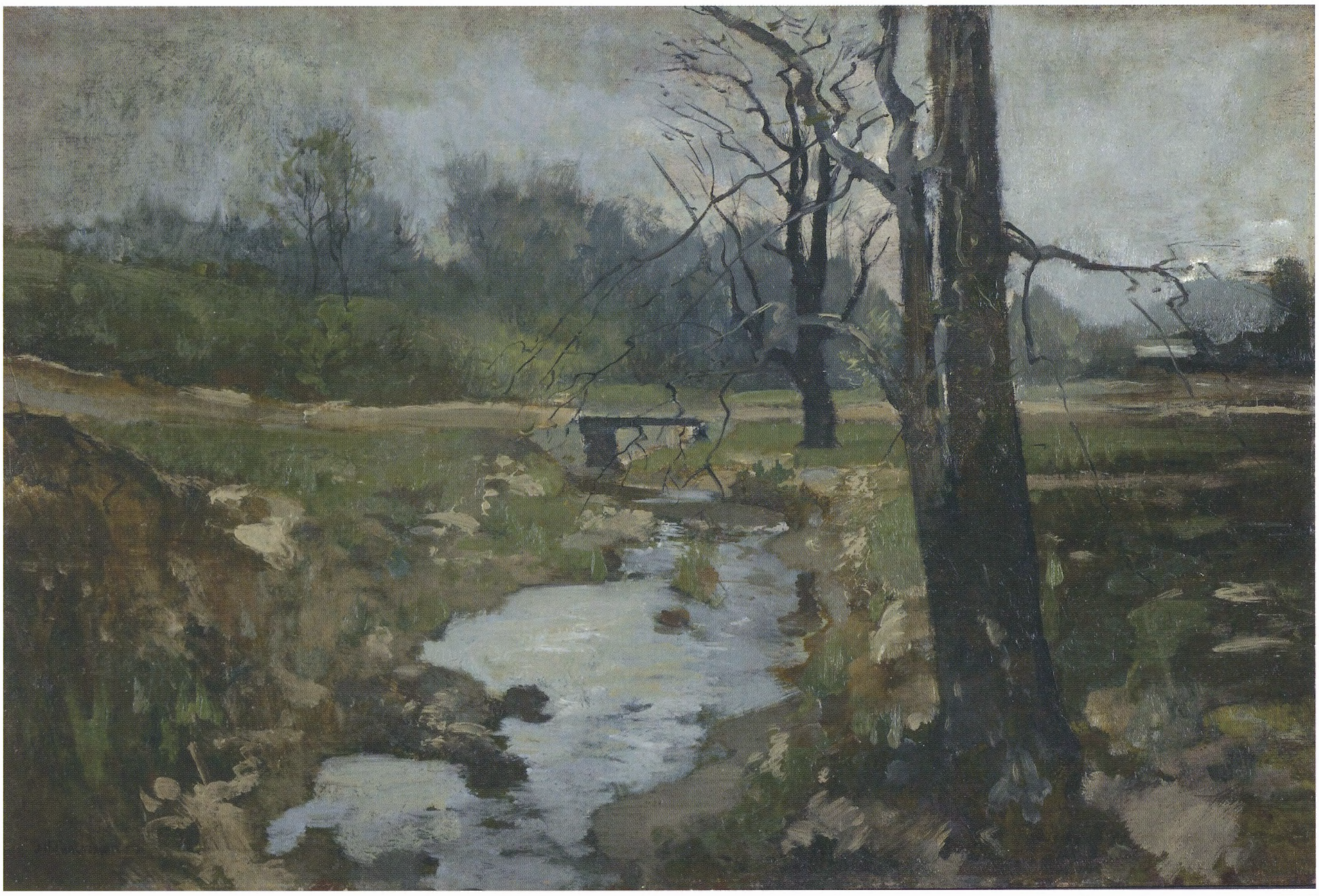


Fig. 4.39. John Henry Twachtman, *Brook near Cincinnati*, c. 1887. Oil on board, 14 ¾ x 22 ¼ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

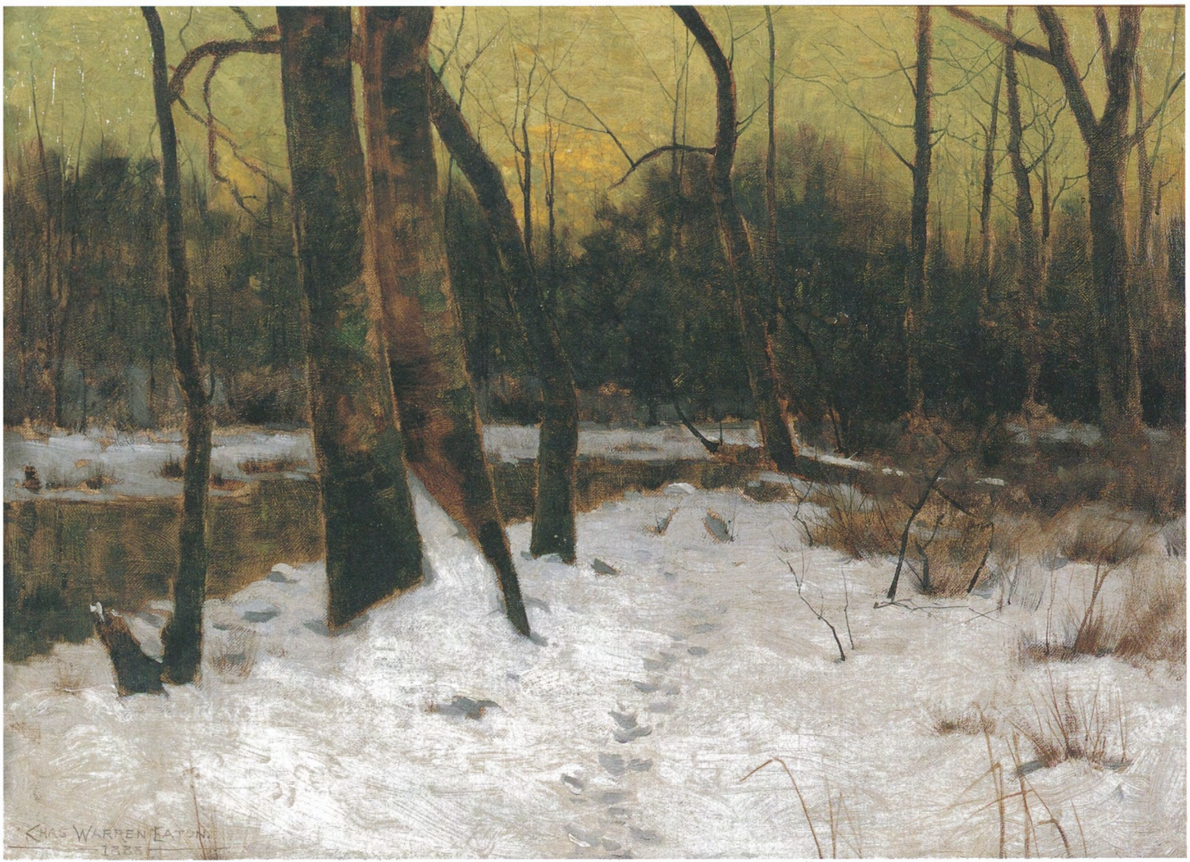


Fig. 4.40. Charles Warren Eaton, *Snow Banks*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

In the 1892 Society of American Artists' annual exhibition, de Kay condemned Abbott Thayer for a fatuous *Virgin Enthroned*, that was neither quite religious nor secular and completely unreal. "Perhaps here is the weakness of the entire picture. There is a lack of point to the whole composition, since the group is not a Madonna with Christ-child and St. John, nor yet a family group which has no relation to Christianity." De Kay continued in his review to disparage the narrative structure of a genre work by George de Forest Brush and nudes by Kenyon Cox, which he found either too idealized, not realistic enough to demonstrate the true beauty of human form, or poorly conceived in color—not tonal enough. "Mr. Kenyon Cox may always be trusted to exhibit nudes, no matter what the outcry may be from Philadelphia matrons or others." De Kay noted that such criticism and prudery, "seem to have induced many artists to paint backs."[76] Inness, who felt somewhat threatened by the renewed interest in figurative art in the late 1870s resulting from the influx of foreign-trained artists from Paris, remained deeply ambivalent about the nude. "The artist must never forget that in nude figure-painting, when the ideal is ignored, the tendency is inevitably to the lustful. The nude human form should never be painted for its own individualities—there is no use in doing so—but from a desire to represent beauty in form. Otherwise the result is invariably something shocking to modesty."[77] Inness, like de Kay, wanted the nude to be idealized, veiled in tonal mystery, which often led to a creeping sentimentality or kitsch and was scorned by artist and critic alike. This gave rise to the vicious circle from which the nude could not free itself until the demise of Victorian prudery released the genre from critical purgatory.

These traditional forms of figurative and genre works, in their American versions, existed in uneasy limbo within a modernizing culture, neither entirely out of fashion, nor progressive in spirit, thus finding no comfortable or profitable niche—for most artists of true integrity—in the expanding American art market. The landscape tradition, in contrast, had undergone relentless updating for more than a century, going back to Constable. De Kay, passionate about the progressive nature of landscape and its nationalistic credo, found much of the figurative work of his day fallen into desuetude—a judgment that time seems to have upheld. With the exception of the finest figurative work by John Singer Sargent, Thomas Eakins, William Merritt Chase, Frank Duveneck, Thomas Dewing, James McNeill Whistler—and later Robert Henri—as well as a handful of others, much of the figurative work that appeared in the society and academy exhibitions of the last decades of the nineteenth century, based on equally banal French models, remains largely forgotten and forgettable. And as will be seen, Chase, J. Alden Weir, Dewing, and even Kenyon Cox were increasingly tempted to move toward landscape as a source of genuine inspiration and a more genuine art, a form that the public and the major collectors—collectors like Thomas B. Clarke, George A. Hearn, William Evans, Charles Lang Freer, John Gellatly, and others—demanded with greater frequency. Only the growing market for mural painting toward the end of the century offered any solace for the uncomfortable situation of the figurative artist, outside of illustration, which was to be superseded in turn by the use of photography.

The practical alternative for American artists was landscape. Landscape filled a market niche in which the Americans had an advantage over their European rivals. When the market for American art began to boom with major single-collector auctions around 1900, landscape overwhelmingly dominated the sales, both in numbers and individual prices. The Tonalist landscape tapped into an ideality of feeling verging on pantheism: poetic and highly suggestive, with a soulful quality unlike anything Europe had to offer—and for less money. And with success came investment cachet. In matters of technical skills and craft, and most important, in terms of sentiment—art galvanized by authentic and deep individual inspiration—the American Tonalists, led by Inness, Wyant, Martin, and Whistler, came to prosper on their home ground while the figurative artists languished.

The Passing of the Flame from the First- to the Second-Generation Tonalists

Although William Morris Hunt, an original member of the Society of American Artists, had drowned tragically in 1879, his inspiration and influence was carried forward by exhibitions of his work (his *Niagara* was featured in the 1879 society annual exhibition and prominently reviewed by Charles de Kay) and his many students and followers. But above all, it was his vastly influential book *Talks on Art*, the modernist art manifesto of the day, that spread his gospel—much of it couched in Emersonian aspirations—far and wide and it could be found on the shelves of his many students and younger artists like Dwight Tryon and J. Francis Murphy.

By the late 1870s John La Farge, who had first sparked the revolt against the National Academy of Design in 1874, had moved away from easel painting into the decorative arts, starting his own stained-glass firm and working on windows and murals in churches in New York and Boston. His seminal and iconic Tonalist painting of 1867–68, *The Last Valley—Paradise Rocks* (see fig. 1.20), won a medal at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in 1876, and in the same year he sold *Paradise Valley* (see fig. 1.20) for three thousand dollars through his Boston gallery, Doll & Richards, which would remain his primary dealer. Although the remainder of his career was devoted to the decorative arts, from which he could make a living, his small, intimate landscape watercolors and still lifes—perennial best-sellers in Boston—had enormous influence on younger artists; his role in the founding and later the running of the Society of American Artists put La Farge in a position of lasting power and influence in guiding the development of progressive art in America.

In many respects, La Farge's growing involvement with the decorative arts, especially stained glass, furthered the goals of the Tonalist movement by broadening both its appeal and directing its fundamental tenets to other fields of artistic endeavor. La Farge's underlying fascination with subtle color tones and harmonies of design, and his goal of creating a unified vision of nature—putting man in touch with a deeper spiritual beauty—animated his art and his guidance of the Society of American Artists. The society's long-standing promotion of Tonalist art, including the exhibition and hanging policies that showed tonal art to best advantage, were probably the result of La Farge's guiding hand. He took over the presidency of the Society of American Artists in its final years and in March 1906, at age seventy-one, offered a valedictory for the society as it merged with the National Academy of Design. He called the last exhibition, "the best the society ever had," and encouraged the younger artists in the society to repeat what the founders had accomplished in 1877—and remake the art scene "... to start the work all over again."[78]

In terms of his art and the promotion of the Tonalist style, La Farge followed a course somewhat parallel to Whistler's endeavors in England during the same decades of the 1880s and 1890s. La Farge preferred to work more behind the scenes, while Whistler promoted himself and his art relentlessly, yet each contributed enormously by example, and in their teachings and writings, to furthering art as a near-religious, often miraculous and life-changing experience. Art historian Kathleen Pyne has written of La Farge, "The primary function of the artist, he concluded, was to transform nature according to a personal way of seeing. La Farge accorded color-light relationships the greatest value in his approach to the art of painting because to him reconstructing the world in terms of colored light signaled the actual dynamic reciprocity between physical object and the artist's subjective feelings. Reality was perceived through the action of the individual mind on external nature, investing 'ordinary objects with beauty by mere direct observation,' as La Farge stated it."[79]

La Farge's quasi-mystical, quasi-naturalistic feeling for art was inspired both by his Catholic faith and his fascination with Oriental art (and philosophy), especially the decorative aspects—formal, simple, contemplative—that he thought spoke most directly to the soul. Even in his stained glass and late watercolors, La Farge's feeling for mystery, comparable to Inness's "unseen" but felt, represents an attempt to capture the essence of things, to embody their soul-life in transparent light and luminous color stains on paper. It is little wonder that William T. Evans, the greatest Tonalist collector of the age, should have installed in his New York home stained-glass windows by Tiffany and others complement his paintings, or as Charles de Kay wrote of Evans's home, "In these stained glass windows are found once more the love for tones that are glad, not too brilliant, warm and gay, not garish or flat, which form the general characteristics of his collection of paintings."[80] La Farge, Tiffany, Cottier and others involved in the decorative arts sought to re-create the mysterious beauty of tones in other media—including pottery, lamps and other household items, in addition to stained glass, contributing to the somber and spiritualized sensibility of the fin-de-siècle era.

For his generation and that of the younger men who matured in the 1880s and 1890s within the orbit of the Society of American Artists, La Farge remained a lodestar. In the range of his creative efforts and intellectual powers, and in his proselytizing fervor, La Farge was almost an alter ego to Whistler: a more sedate and introverted version of the master, perhaps the kind of artist Whistler might have become had he pursued a career in America, welcomed and surrounded by admirers. In a sense, through his French parents and highly cultivated upbringing, La Farge had imbibed the same sophisticated milieu of ideas and art that Whistler had known in his early years in Paris and London. It is little wonder that La Farge was an enormous fan of his expatriate colleague, and saw to it that his brainchild, the Society of American Artists, became something of a shrine to Whistler and a congenial home to his legions of followers.

In that spirit, La Farge made sure that Whistler's painting *The Coast of Brittany* (also known as *Alone with the Tide*), 1861 (see chap. 3, fig. 3.58), which the National Academy had skied in 1874, was secured by the society for its first exhibition in 1878. From that point on, Whistler became a frequent presence in the society's exhibitions (exhibiting in 1878, 1879, 1882, 1886, 1897, 1899, and 1902), and a member in 1886, along with another London resident and Whistler acolyte, Henry Muhrman. Whistler's persona and radical reputation was so pervasive in advanced American art circles, even before his Nocturnes and pastels were shown extensively in America in the late 1880s, that he was described by critics as the "demiurge" of the Society of American Artists, a kind of deity or spirit that had inspired its creation.[81]

Publicity from the 1878 Ruskin trial in London polished Whistler's reputation in his home country as a cultural gadfly, as did a lengthy article in 1879 in *Scribner's Monthly* (under Gilder's guidance) on the artist's paintings and etchings.[82] Charles de Kay was probably the first and most astute admirer of Whistler in America; the critic's first novel (de Kay was also an accomplished poet and short-story writer), *The Bohemian*, published in 1878, contains deep insights into Whistler's work. The Americans in Frank Duveneck's circle who had witnessed Whistler's work in Venice in 1879–80 brought back awed reports, while a testy friendship with William Merritt Chase, elected president of the Society of American Artists in 1880, became an important conduit for Whistler's growing reputation and stylistic innovations, which in turn were promoted by Oscar Wilde's tour of America in 1882, taking on added momentum under the rubric "art for arts' sake." In 1881, Whistler's *Portrait of the Artist's Mother: Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1,* 1871, was shown at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and then at the Society of American Artists in the spring of 1882. This was the first exhibition of a mature Whistler work at the society, which fully demonstrated the artist's aesthetic restraint, breathless charm of design, and mastery of subtle tonalities. Henry James described the painting as "so noble and admirable a picture, such a masterpiece of tone, of feeling, of the power to render life. . . . "[83] An up-to-date exhibition of Whistler's Venetian etchings and his famous *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (see fig. 3.63)—which had prompted his suit against John Ruskin—opened in New York at H. Wunderlich & Co. in 1883, and then traveled to Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Detroit. The exhibition, titled *Arrangement in White and Yellow,* constituted a faithful reproduction of a London installation of his works in 1883: the gallery was decked out floor to ceiling in an arrangement of yellow and white tones, Whistler's London catalogue was reprinted, including the scathing reviews of his work that, in time, made conservative critics look ridiculous. As in London, attendants in the gallery wore matching uniforms of pale yellow. The show inspired a generation of Americans to appreciate both the delicate beauty of the etching medium and the decorative hanging schemes Whistler endorsed, giving a further boost to the Aesthetic movement in America. Whistler's exhibition designs, coincident with the artistic installations employed at the society, became the standard for progressive art venues in the years to come. H. Wunderlich & Co. exhibited more of Whistler's smaller works in 1889, a show that attracted much attention and many American collectors, including Charles Lang Freer, who would amass a huge collection of Whistler for his gallery on the Mall in Washington, DC. Not until the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 was a comprehensive showing of Whistler's greatest work assembled. The gold medal bestowed on Whistler further confirmed him in the eyes of his countrymen as a true-blue American artist, and figurehead for a style and attitude of the utmost sophistication and dash.

Tonalists commanded the American art section at the Chicago World's Fair, and Whistler soon ascended to the pantheon alongside George Inness, Alexander Wyant, and Homer Dodge Martin. Whistler owed much of his recognition in America to William Merritt Chase, his erstwhile friend (they had many scraps), who had done so much to promote his style through lectures and teaching. The Chicago success was probably critical in Whistler's decision to actively place much of his art in the hands of American collectors and museums, where he determined his ultimate reputation would be best served. Clearly, Whistler's profound influence on American art in the early 1880s was a good ten years ahead of what it was in England, and fifteen years ahead of Paris, where, by 1900, he was all the rage in the studios.[84] America's love affair with Whistler, coming a full decade before the early 1890s boom in American Impressionism, not only survived, but in fact grew in strength—ringing deep chords in the national psyche—and fully prevailed by 1900 over Impressionist inroads.

Whistler's continuing dominance of the aesthetic stage had more to it than his mastery of style and the effortless grace and transcendent beauty of his finest work. His dematerializing offerings served up to fin-de-siècle Americans—in a nation beset by rapid industrialization and social upheaval—the icons of a new religion of art, a simulacrum of a world at once changeless and transformed by subjective truth, ineffable yet comforting; mirroring Inness's world of the mysterious "unseen," and La Farge's luminous portals of stained glass, which transfixed aesthete and common man alike. Whistler's Tonalist harmonies, whether landscape or ethereal figurative works, approached the form of pure music, an essence uplifting and harmonious in a world of growing dissonance. Whistler's dispensation was the visual cure for a material age changing beyond recognition. At his death in 1903, his place in art history was widely debated. Many thought him the greatest etcher of all time, even placing him ahead of Rembrandt. Perhaps more important, as his contemporaries acknowledged in 1903, Whistler's revolution was on a level with Manet and Monet and set the stage for the progressive art movements of the day. Noted an article in *Brush and Pencil,* "Impressionism has been termed the century's most important contribution to art, and in a very vital sense Whistler antedated by six or seven years Manet, Monet, Sisley, and Renoir, and the other men who broke away from tradition and sought to paint, not facts, but impressions . . . it remains true that he revolutionized the point of view of the world."[85]

The Late Work of George Inness: His Synthetic Style and the Crosscurrents of Influence in the Development of Tonalism, 1880–1904

Perhaps of all the first-generation Tonalists, none profited more from the radical changes that blew into New York art circles with the younger men trained in Europe than George Inness. Although Inness was a founding member of the Society of American Artists, his participation was more symbolic than active; he did not need the society's help in selling his paintings. But the short-term revival of interest in figurative art brought on by the new arrivals caused him to turn his hand to figurative genre works between 1880 and 1884. Economic uncertainties in the early 1880s and the influx of European figurative art may have played a part in his decision. The burst of enthusiasm for genre and figures proved short-lived and Inness soon refocused his energies on landscape. More crucially for Inness, the advent of the society sounded the death knell for his longtime adversaries. The "panoramic leviathans" and "ten-acre canvases" of the older Hudson River men, who had been the bane of his existence, were now openly disparaged. As Inness's biographer Nicolai Cikovsky has observed: "Much of what became generally acceptable in the late 1870s—suggestive intimacy and painterliness—Inness had been professing, virtually alone, for nearly twenty years. But now, his art was no longer as singular and out of place as it once had been. As Clarence Cook saw . . . speaking of paintings in the first exhibition of the Society of American Artists in 1878 by Inness and other artists such as William Morris Hunt, John La Farge, and Alexander Wyant who, like Inness, had been influenced by modern French painting: 'In old Academy exhibitions these pictures would have looked strange and foreign. Here, they are quite at home, and American enough, and we can judge them fairly because we can compare them with work of their own kind.'"[86]

Inness may have benefited in another way. The flow of figure paintings displayed in the society's exhibitions brought out ingrained patriotic resentment in American critics—especially, as has been seen, in Charles de Kay, who feared the dilution and corruption of the American vision, and thus began to favor the more innovative landscape artists. By 1881 Charles de Kay was even lecturing artists in his reviews, instructing them to follow the new disposition as exemplified by Inness. In his review of the 1881 National Academy of Design annual exhibition, de Kay scolded Wyant for too great a variety of effects (specifically, the vestigial Hudson River formulas Wyant had not entirely dispensed with). "The direct sketch from nature is too closely followed, or else he has not the art to deviate happily from it." De Kay then proceeds to analyze a painting by Inness, *Old Roadway*, and explain how the artist achieved his simple and quiet beauties, "a style that betokens the best poise of all the faculties." The critic describes how the composition is constructed to focus completely on the central tree motif. "And yet it would be difficult to say what shaped leaf they bear, and whether they are surely oaks, chestnuts, or hickories. Mr. Inness has not painted them directly from nature, dropping the unnecessary details, and presenting so far as in him lies, the character of large trees like the oak, chestnut, and hickories. It is a bold thing to do in these days of facsimile, when so much attention is paid to realism, that we fancy nature can be exactly reproduced. As a fact, and one which is continually overlooked, nature cannot be retained in facsimile even by the use of the draughtsman's *camera lucida* or the photographer's *camera obscura*. Mr. Inness merely carries further than other artists the imaginative treatment of landscape in some of his pictures."[87] De Kay recognized in Inness, as he did in Albert Pinkham Ryder and later in Ralph Albert Blakelock, a homegrown, imaginative, pictorial force that trumped both the old realism of the Hudson River School and the academic and plein-air realism from Europe.

In de Kay's eyes, with the arrival of European-trained Americans, Inness seemed more genuinely American than ever. And for a while, in the early 1880s at least, Inness may have had fewer competitors in landscape among the progressive artists, although he, too, tried his hand at figurative work, without great success. Inness learned from the new artists and they from him. What was incontrovertible was that Inness had set the mold in American landscape. Far from done, he remained resilient and productive into his sixties, his work gaining in strength and power of insight. His late synthetic style, which flourished in the years around his important retrospective exhibition of 1884, was both a culmination and refinement of all he had been accomplishing for twenty years before, and represented an advance on the modernist dream of pure expression, fusing objective and subjective experience, the descriptive and imaginative, the actual and spiritual. Within five years of the first Society of American Artists exhibition in 1878, Inness's work had undergone a change as profound as the artist's shift to a more tonal and soft-edged style in 1863–64, precipitated by his move from Medfield to Eagleswood.

The rage for Whistler and the design principles of the Aesthetic movement, growing exponentially within the society and the Art Students League, provided the crucial backdrop for Inness to evolve in tandem with the new dispensations. He abandoned figurative experiments, painted less outdoors, and began to work more and more in the studio, taking up design strategies of the Aesthetic movement that stressed unified tonal harmonies and compositional banding, with an emphasis on horizontal and vertical patterns that produced a feeling of calm. Inness scholar Michael Quick has described this new phase of he artist's development as an "aesthetic style." "In the new approach, the artist, working in the studio, was in complete control, free to arrange and interpret elements of the landscape to suit aesthetic or expressive purposes. The motif, the lighting, the composition, the color—all were arbitrary and subject to manipulation."[88] *Sunshine and Clouds*, 1883, (fig. 4.41), is a sumptuous early example of Inness's developing feel for manipulating the landscape elements to achieve both pictorial truth and aesthetic pleasure. The fluid diagonal patterning of painterly land forms, threatening sky, and roiling clouds, and the tonal variations of light and dark values pressing forward and back from the plane of the canvas, create a sense of balance, harmony, and visual interest—a composition that is as tactile as it is representational, artificial yet pleasingly familiar. Here were the essentials of the Tonalist aesthetic as it evolved in

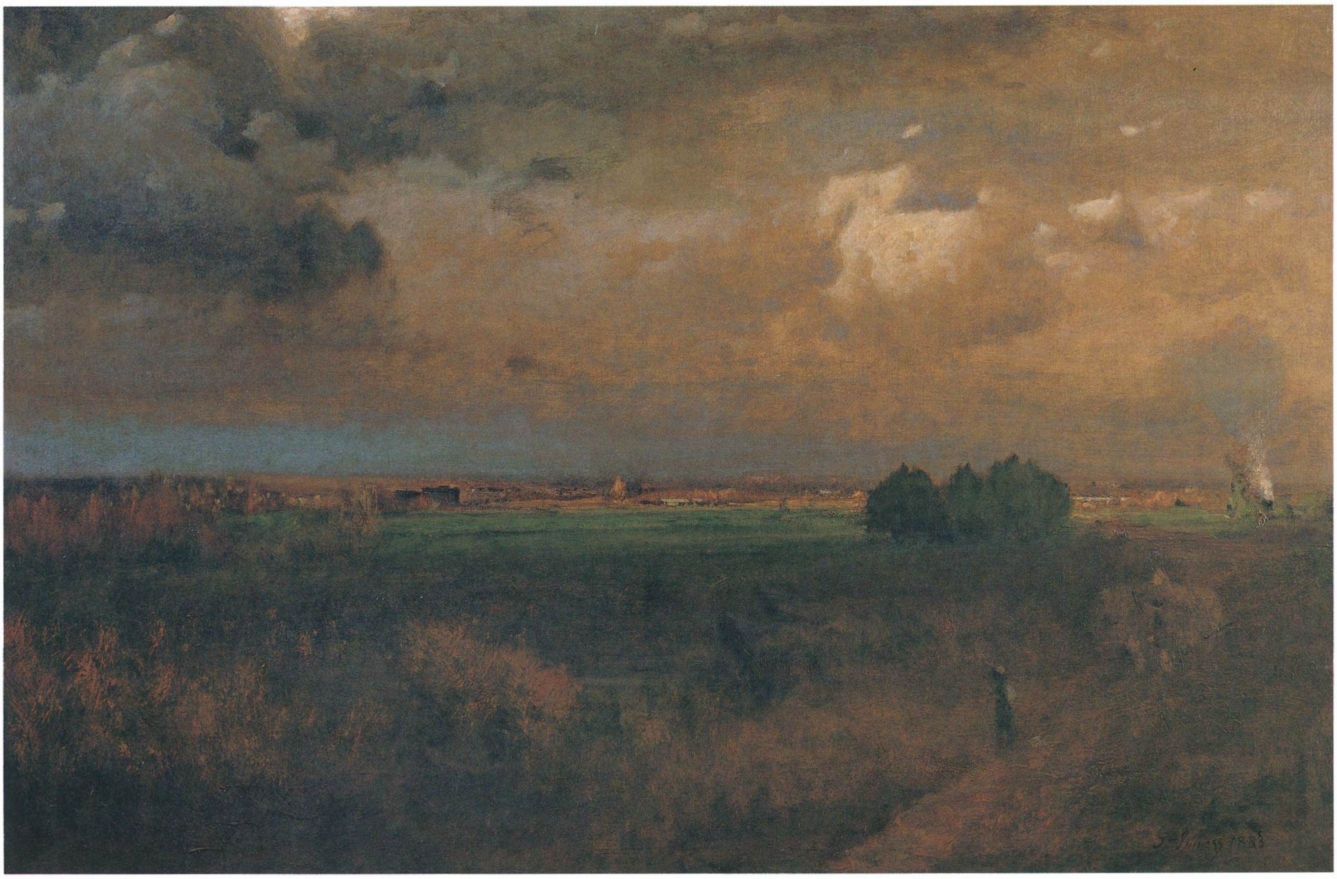


Fig. 4.41. George Inness, *Sunshine and Clouds*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 27 ½ x 41 ½ in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

the 1880s and 1890s: a fundamentally studio art synthesized out of memory and conceptualized in terms of formal design principles.

Age and financial success (between 1882 and 1886 Inness became financially secure) only freed Inness in his quest for a more unified and spiritual vision. Like Whistler, Inness felt free to write about his intentions, often with evangelical enthusiasm, in the hope of educating his public. "Art is represented of spiritual principles," he wrote, "it is founded upon laws which are analogous to the laws of life. The great spiritual principle of unity, for example, is the fundamental principle of all Art. The great spiritual principle of harmony—harmony in form, harmony in colour, the general harmony arising from the relation of things to one another, and the relation of parts to parts. . . . "[89] Inness increasingly sought to manifest the unseen in the harmonious relating of all parts to the whole, color or tone giving spiritual life to that unity. For Inness, the Tonalist aesthetic provided a kind of supersensible unified theory of physics, a visual metaphor of the energy fields that bound the material universe. Inness tried to visualize on canvas, in the juxtapositions of various colors and tones, the spiritual force fields he intuited in nature. The vibration and refraction of tones hinted at the latent energies ubiquitous in the visible universe. In a very real sense, Inness was seeking to elucidate not just Swedenborgian correspondences, but the transcendental aspirations of Emerson and Thoreau: that the metamorphic force in nature is not just blindly Darwinian but encompasses a spiritual entity of some kind. Much as La Farge had looked to nature, especially the light and color relationships of forms in nature, as the source for artistic inspiration, so Inness viewed nature through the prism of a creative idea, an activating intelligence, fundamentally human but touching on the divine. Inness acknowledged that his paintings told a story, but it was a story told purely in pictorial terms. "The painter tells his story with the pathos of his colour, with the delicacies of his *chiaro-oscuro*, with the suggestions of his form . . . a subtle essence which exists in all things of the material world, and which addresses eloquently, through the senses, the human consciousness, creating an intellectual perception of niceties of relation, of peculiarities of condition, and constituting an atmosphere about the bald details of facts . . . and thus speaks to them of that which is unseen."[90] In short, Inness's Tonalist strategies were the artist's means of exploring this invisible world.

Inness's thinking about his craft—and he was first and foremost a craftsman—was couched in his Swedenborgian belief in a parallel spiritual world that approximated much of what was apprehended in the everyday, except on a finer level of acuity. But talk—writing—was cheap; Inness's landscape metaphysics happened, or often failed to happen, in the heat of creation. This absolute allegiance to craft was something

Inness shared with Whistler; Inness spoke in quasi-religious and passionate terms about his craft, while Whistler spoke more in terms of ecstatic poetry. La Farge and Hunt had a similar spiritual bent, perhaps in a lower key, but enough that their followers like Dwight Tryon, Blakelock, Ryder, and even J. Francis Murphy caught the Transcendentalist spark—if not from Inness and the first-generation Tonalists, then from Thoreau: all were readers of the Concord poet-naturalist. These first-generation Tonalists were all moved by currents of Transcendentalist longings, be it post-Puritan aestheticism in Whistler's case, high Catholicism with a touch of Eastern mysticism in La Farge's, or Swedenborgian ideas of correspondences between the realm of the real and ideal for Inness.

Charles de Kay, who, according to Inness scholar Nicolai Cicovsky, wrote the best interpretation of Inness's art during the artist's lifetime, could be both brutal and adulatory about Inness. De Kay drew the line at blatant religious imagery, or where sentiment (personal feeling) stopped and sentimentality (religious or saccharine narrative) adulterated the mix. As early as 1878, de Kay, reviewing Inness's work at the National Academy of Design, upbraided the artist for including his own poetry on the frame of a painting, and for overall "bumptiousness," suggesting the artist's work, "would be improved in tone by hanging in a smoky chimney."[91] Inness had broken his own rules by telling and not showing—and Inness already had a reputation for unevenness. A year later in the Society of American Artists' annual exhibition of 1879, de Kay noted that Inness's ultimate success was as a craftsman who keeps his excesses in check. "Mr. Inness is in every sense a serious painter, and if occasionally his seriousness, like that of some religious sects, runs over into something very near to the ludicrous, he evidently has full control of himself, and gravitates back to a centre of reason."[92] Three years later de Kay, using the pseudonym Henry Eckford in *Scribner's Magazine*, praised Inness mightily, precisely because the artist "does not express [his religion], but hides it, in his art . . . In the mind of Inness, religion, landscape, and human nature mingle so thoroughly that there is no separating the several ideas."[93] For de Kay and the Gilder circle this quasi-American religion of landscape represented the way forward, but the line between the good and bad was a thin one. As has been seen, de Kay could be devastating in his reviews of work containing blatant religious symbols or sentimental tripe. Landscape was propitious for the creation of an American art precisely because it could embody true sentiment—Inness's "unseen" essences—while doing without narration. The pitfall for so many figurative artists was that they remained trapped by the focalized conventions and worn-out forms of genre painting.

Inness could get away with his religious fervor (which he liked to write about, when not expostulating at length to an unwitting listener), distilling his ecstatic flights in his art, because for the most part the consummate artist and craftsman predominated in the aesthetic struggle of creation. It would be hard to determine the demarcation between the artist's spiritual drive and his creative drive, so thoroughly fused were the impulses, as were the objective and subjective elements in his landscapes. For all practical purposes, Inness's idealism and his artistic judgment were one and the same. In a painting like *October*, 1886 (fig. 4.42), Inness has created a world of ethereal grace that epitomizes his newfound interest in the Aesthetic movement and its emphasis on geometric balance. Throughout, geometric structure and surface design are carefully plotted; vertical and horizontal landscape elements tantalize the gaze—the push and pull of color form into and out of space that Hans Hoffman would one day make famous. The eye is wafted into recessional space by the diagonal banks of a stream, directed to an uncertain vanishing point, which then arrays to right and left where tree forms of varying intervals, sizes, shapes, and colors further dazzle and delight. Even the illusion of depth is thwarted by the way the green masses of the stream bank begin to float in hazy space—forming and re-forming hypnotic patterns on the surface plane. The brilliantly matched tones of green set up a throbbing counterpoint in the eye, hinting at imperceptible movement. Here is a textbook rendition of Birge Harrison's description of the vibration of warm undertone and cool overtone, and the refraction of complementary soft-edged hues, creating a quivering vibrato. Color notes are strategically placed to further beguile the observer into belief in such a visionary world. Restful yet intangible, the fictile forms retain an amorphous and changeable airiness, conjuring a kind of Ovidian dream of calm in which the dreamer remains safely outside the metamorphic realm—yet exquisitely aware of every sensuous moment captured in the play of paint translated into dappled light. Though Inness had his roots in Barbizon art, *October* is of another time and dimension, of a world yet undreamed of by the artists of 1830. In its balance, quietude, and decorative pattern structure, *October* is a quintessential example of Aesthetic Tonalism.

As distinctive and original as his late work is, during this period Inness was almost certainly influenced by the younger artists. Possibly something of J. Frank Currier's expressive watercolors from the 1879 American Watercolor Society exhibition had rubbed off on him, as had been the case with Winslow Homer. La Farge's early landscapes and still lifes, with their spellbinding and intricate half- and quarter-tones, refracted light, and even backlighting—and possibly the mystic glow of his stained glass—might well have touched something in the old master. Certainly Whistler's delicately toned etchings and possibly his pastels full of floating color forms were known to Inness, as must have been Whistler's masterpiece of harmonized tones and banding forms exhibited

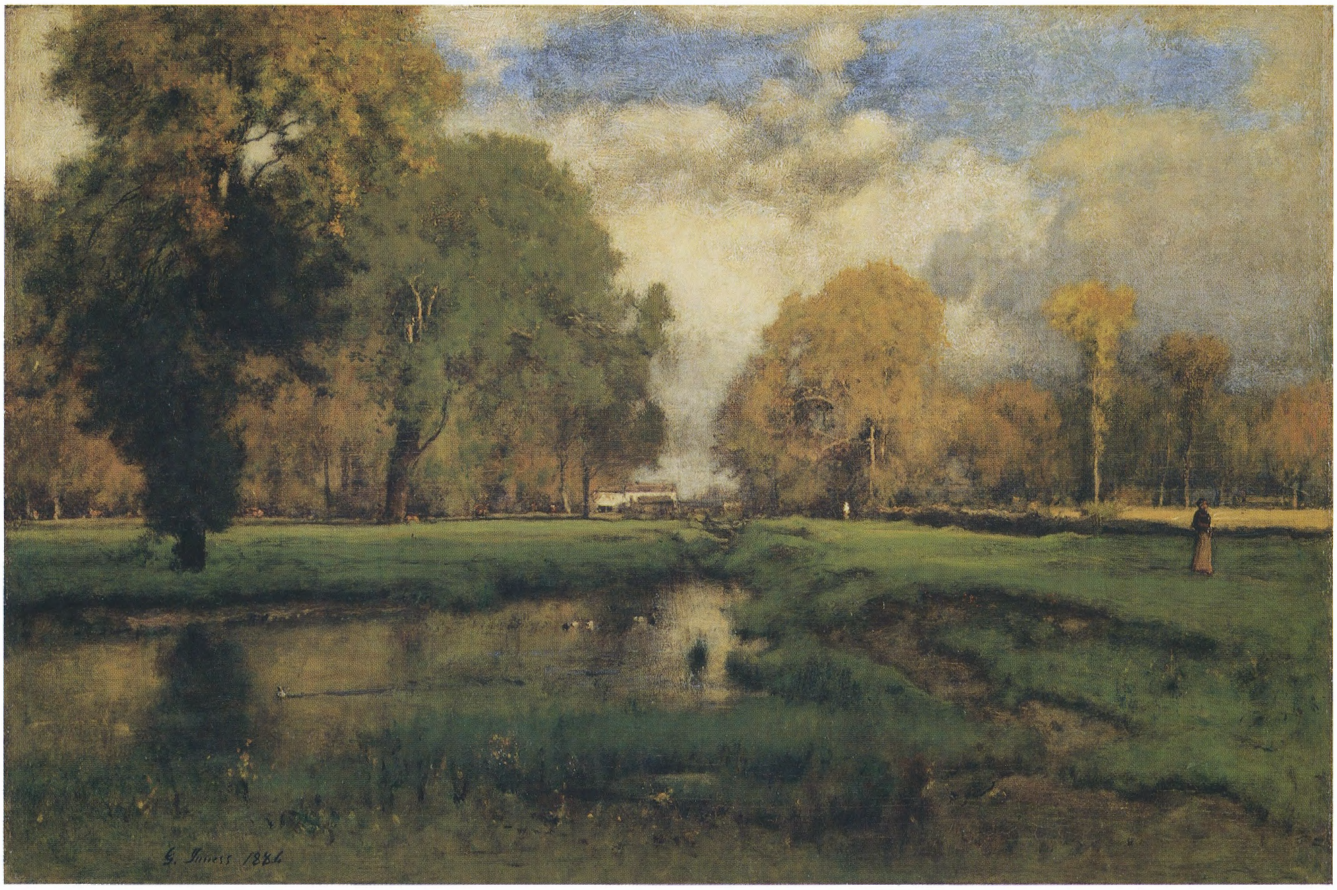


Fig. 4.42. George Inness, *October*, 1886. Oil on panel, 20 x 30 in. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

at the American Society of Artists in 1882, *Arrangement in Gray and Black, No. 1: Portrait of the Artist's Mother*. Surely, Inness was aware of the great strides John Henry Twachtman had made by 1885, especially his winter paintings of Cincinnati that were shown to great effect in the 1882 society annual exhibition, and which displayed a precocious use of surface decoration and design flair far in advance of anything Inness had attempted at that time. The visionary George Fuller—a founding member of the Society of American Artists—also could not have escaped Inness's notice. The synergistic dynamic that existed between American artists in the 1880s can only be compared to the early years of the Abstract Expressionists. But in the end, it is Inness the artist that trumps all latent sources: he effortlessly absorbed influence the way he absorbed ideas and landscape motifs—a seamless whole that galvanized his creative drive.

Inness's sympathetic imagination was captured by the artist's son, George Inness Jr., writing about his father's working methods, especially the critical issue of tone, which for Inness was the essential element that breathed spiritual life and mystery into his work and was the aspect that transfixed the younger artists maturing in his shadow. "When he painted he painted at white heat. Passionate, dynamic in his force, I have seen him sometimes like a madman, stripped to the waist, perspiration rolling like a mill-race from his face, with some tremendous idea struggling for expression. . . .

". . . I have a canvas here I've been fussing over. How does it look?"

"Fine Pop," I answered enthusiastically; "all right, beautiful. Fine tone."

"Yes, it has things in it, but it's stupid. Confound it! It's too good; it's all tone. That's what's the matter with it. I've got too much detail in the foreground. That's a thing we are always running up against to tickle the buyer—to make a few dollars. Those weeds don't mean anything. Let's take them out; they are not the picture. This picture is very good, but it's all tone."

"Yes, Pop, but that's what I like about it; it's beautiful in tone."

"Perhaps; but that's what makes it stupid. Why in thunder can't we put something in that's out of tone? You see, there's no interest in this picture. It's well drawn, yes, well constructed, well painted, and perfectly tonal; but there's no passion in it. A picture without passion has no meaning, and it would be far better had it never been painted. Imitation is worthless . . . Now we'll put a dab of dark here and light over there. Just like music, George—the harmony of tone. We thump, thump, thump the keys to the distance, but don't forget to put in the harsh note, the accidental. It makes the contrast that gives interest and beauty to the whole, the gradation of light and shade which corresponds to music. What is art, anyway? Nothing but temperament, expression of your feelings."[94]

Inness's concern that tone—beautiful and exquisite tone (the essential element of the artist's belief system)—not become an end in itself or an excuse for a visually lazy or uninteresting painting conveys volumes about his critical standards, and how his consummate craftsmanship prevented him from descending into overt sentimentality, religious or otherwise. Inness's many failed paintings demonstrate how easily the Tonalist aesthetic in the hands of less talented epigoni could easily become banal and clichéd. It took a master with the full technical finesse at his fingertips to get the right balance between the mysterious veil of illusion and a few necessary facts to create a work balanced for emotional resonance and depth of visual interest.

A work of 1885, *From the Shawangunk Mountains* (fig. 4.43), is a precocious example of the increasing freedom and vitality of Inness's brushwork in the last decade of his life, anticipating the full range of expressive creativity that would come to characterize the artist's late synthetic style. Very little is detailed per se, vivid paint marks stand in for the foreground grasses, flowers, and the abandoned woodpile, approximating in their gestural feel the sensations produced by the wind gusts of a passing storm. Everything seems in motion, responding to metamorphic forces both momentary and perennial. Even more dexterous are the thin lines of horizontal pigments used to depict the distant hills and skies, and the brooding slather of black paint for a threatening storm, the elegance and simplicity approaching the kind of paint handling Whistler employed in his Nocturnes. Whether painted on the spot or from studies in the studio, *From the Shawangunk Mountains* displays Inness's ability to translate emotional states and spiritual exuberance—and an identifiable place—into untrammeled paint that is alive with feeling.

Early Autumn, Montclair, 1888 (fig. 4.44), is a stellar example of the synthesizing force Inness could bring to bear in his late work, in which all the elements of the painter's craft are deployed, not only achieving a superb equilibrium of visual data but a haunting kinetic energy that infuses means and ends. Fantastic gestural handling of pigment—paint that is scumbled, incised with the butt end of the brush, and glazed—is harmonized with a subtle sense of color and tone to produce an effect of brooding calm. Much of the black in the sky is deftly produced by a scraping back of the blue and white to reveal the black underpaint. By 1888 Inness had been living in Montclair for a decade; this was his home ground, a place he knew and loved to the depths of his soul. Yet this love of place comes through not as a faithful plein-air recording of the known and habitual but in the evocation of the unseen—the metamorphic forces in nature—by the habitué. Crucial to his success, as it was to other Tonalists, in creating both a feeling of harmony and quietude along with a sense of underlying motion—be it wind, spirit, growth, or decay—was Inness's consummate handling of color and tone.

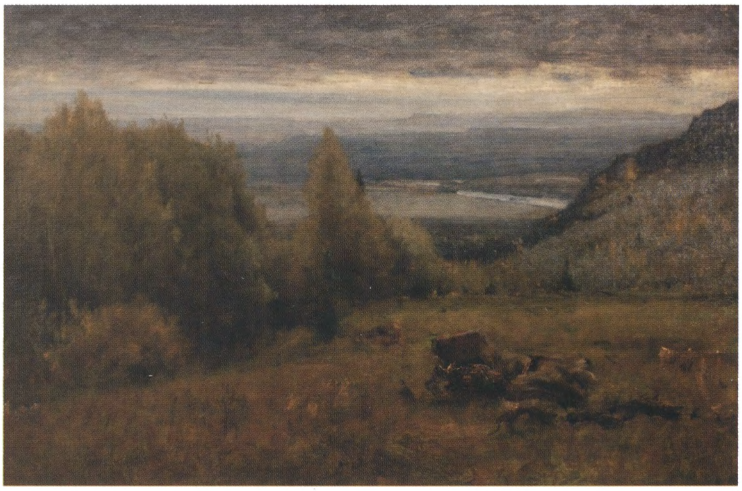


Fig. 4.43. George Inness, *From the Shawangunk Mountains*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

George Inness Jr., an artist in his own right, described the crucial interplay between color and tone in his father's work, providing a critical insight into how Inness understood tone. Color for Inness meant the arrangement of colors that would suggest qualities of light and atmosphere, heat and cold. The blending and harmonizing of color produces a vivid sense of the interaction between natural light and local color. "When it gives a bright vivid feeling we call it 'color,' when it gives an even subtle luminosity, as in Corot, we call it 'tone.' These two combined give the very glory of nature. Quality is that indescribable something that permeates the whole tone of a picture and gives it the sense of fullness, depth, and completeness. To have a colorful picture with quality of tone, the colors must be complimentary. A red must not jar against a blue; the blue and red must be toned to harmonize ... if forms are painted in shadow, a contrast is established, and if these shadow forms are kept full and permeated with the general tone and color of the picture, there is a pleasant harmony that lends beauty to the whole ... The tonal artist is delightful, and when he has this tonal sense combined with grace and form, as Corot had, he reaches a height which very few attain. Now, all this George Inness has, combined with the most vivid sense of brilliant color, which brings his canvases to those heights which none has surpassed."[95]

Glazing was fundamental to Inness's Tonalist aesthetic, as it was to his contemporaries. His son described his father's methods of using a transparent pigment such as umber, black, sienna, or cobalt thinned with oil and spread over the canvas. These delicate veils of tone provided much of the intangible metaphysics of Inness's art. "This lowers the tone of the canvas, but brings the whole in harmony, and enriches the color of the opaque parts of the picture. On this glaze the artist generally paints again with opaque color to bring up the light and add to the texture ... Thus, according to this method, my father would drive along, glazing down and painting up the lights,

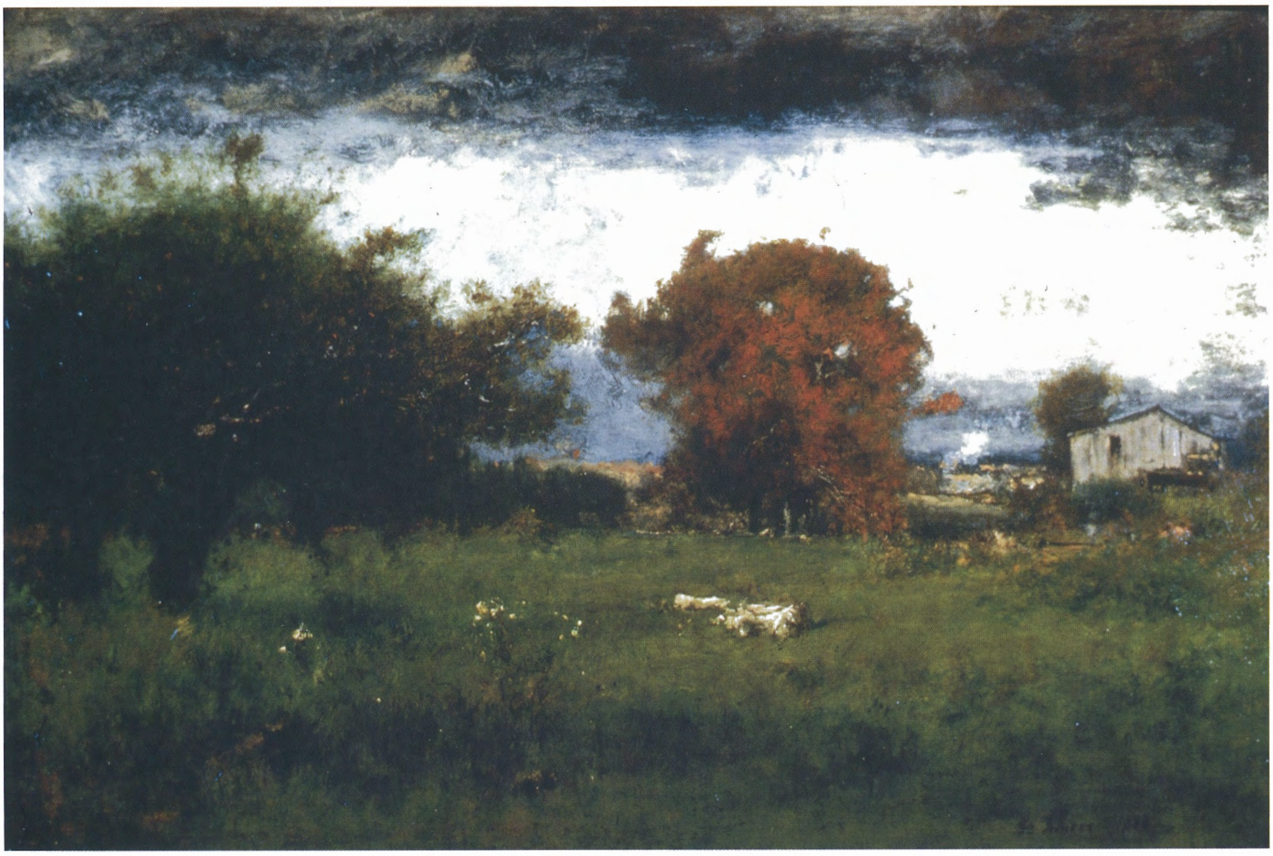


Fig. 4.44. George Inness, *Early Autumn, Montclair*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 30 x 45 in., Montclair Art Museum. Museum purchase; funds provided by Dr. Arthur Hunter in memory of Ethel Hunter, the Valley Foundation and Acquisition Fund, 1960.28.

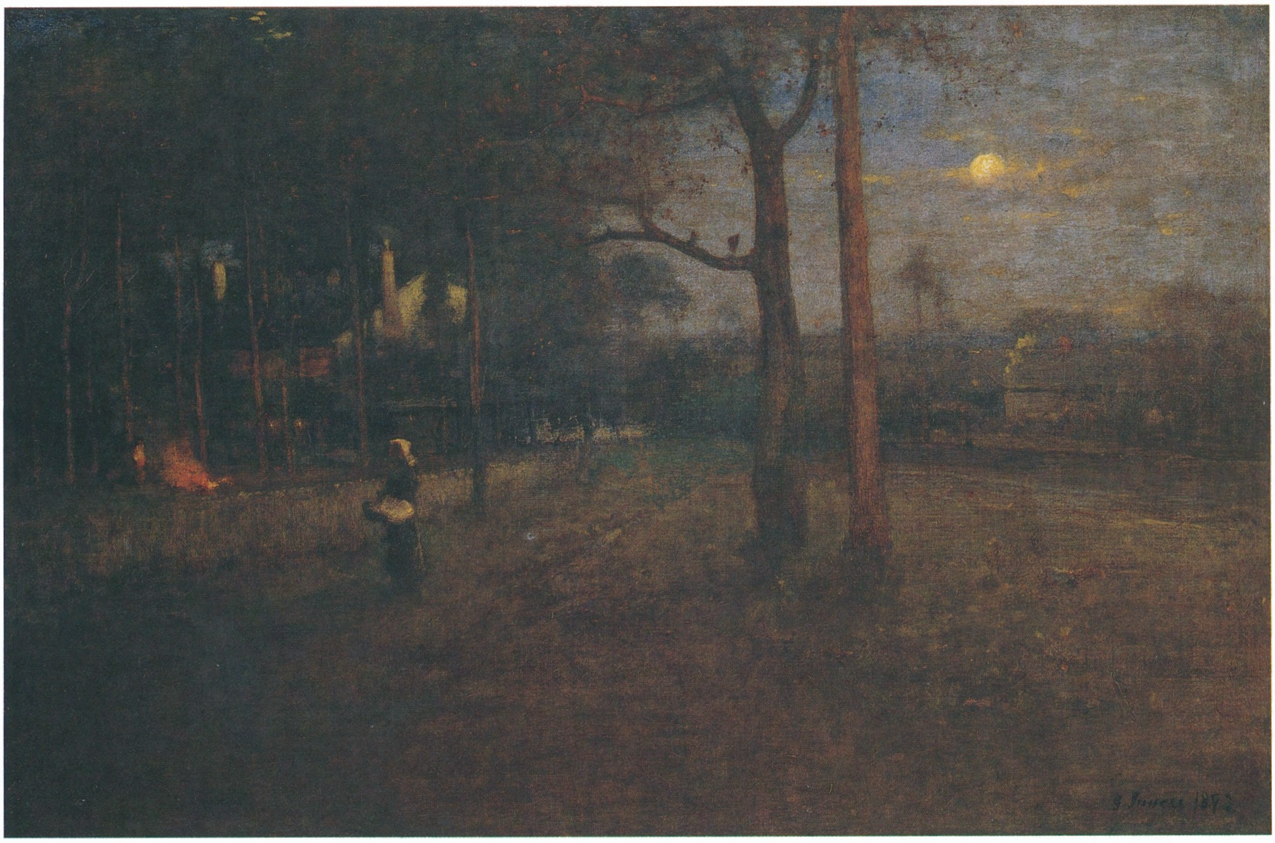


Fig. 4.45. George Inness, *Moonlight, Tarpon Springs*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 30 x 45 ½ in. Acquired 1911; sold 1928; reacquired 1939. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

rubbing and scrubbing, but *always keeping the color pure* until the picture was finished to his satisfaction or until he wearied of the subject."[96]

George Inness Jr. pointed out that although his father painted many of his late synthetic works from memory, or made them up literally as he painted them, the facts of nature—the colors in a rainbow, the shape of an elm, the type of autumn meadow flower—was scrupulously accurates, so ingrained was nature's vocabulary. A work from the artist's late years when he sojourned in Florida, *Moonlight, Tarpon Springs*, 1892 (fig. 4.45), represents Inness's consummate mastery of his late synthetic style, combining expressive paint handing, subtly modulated tonalities throughout, and a meticulously calculated arrangement of forms, especially the foreground and background trees to create decorative patterns that speak to some vague but tantalizing metaphysical reality, whether of arcane mathematics (in which the artist indulged) or hazy and layered memories, which in turn trigger the imagination and an indefinable sense of wonderment. Having long mastered the decorative potential of Aesthetic Tonalism, Inness in his last years became an avatar of the expressive Tonalism (bigger, broader, and brasher brushwork) that increasingly dominated the exhibitions by the century's end. When he died in 1894, Inness had already been acclaimed as America's greatest landscape painter—perhaps its greatest artist. He would soon be joined by Homer Dodge Martin and Alexander Wyant as the Tonalist movement gained momentum after the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 (in which Inness's greatest works were featured) and throughout the 1890s. Inness had been perfecting his art for more than forty years, an indomitable presence and energizing force for the modernist impulse for expression. His example, his soaring spirit and perseverance, served as a beacon to members of the younger generation. His fully attended memorial service at the National Academy in 1894 was front-page news and reported in detail. Even his very last canvases, often thinly painted in broad passages of watery color with flickering detail—not unlike Whistler's late seascapes of the 1890s—push the expressive bounds of the landscape genre as only Albert Pinkham Ryder and Ralph Albert Blakelock were doing at about the same time.

By 1907, the modernist historian and critic Charles Caffin would comment about Inness's late work: "These landscapes are the product of a mind that, in the matter of painting, had freed itself from the necessity of conscious intellectual process and entered into liberty of spirit, and of a hand become so facile by practice that it moved in immediate and faithful response to the suggestion of the mind. They are the expressions, not of what is palpable and material, but of an emotional or spiritual mood."[97] In terms of Inness's mastery of tone (not to mention Whistler's), perhaps Kenneth Clark put it best in reference to the greatest master of tone, Velásquez: "Drawing may be summary, color drab, but if the relations of tone are true, the picture will hold. For some reason truth of tone cannot be achieved by trial and error, but seems to be an intuitive—almost a physical—endowment, like absolute pitch in music; and gives, when we perceive it, a pure and timeless pleasure."[98]

The Rise of the Indigenous Tonalists: Albert Pinkham Ryder, Ralph Albert Blakelock, and J. Francis Murphy

The slow transition of the Society of American Artists from its early touting of foreign- trained artists and the academic figurative tradition to the domestic landscape was hastened by the rise of a group of indigenous Tonalists in the early 1880s, artists largely trained in America and steeped in the traditions and literary lore of their homeland. They, along with Inness, Wyant, and Martin, provided a leaven to the cosmopolitan polish and elegance propagated by the acolytes of William Merritt Chase and James McNeill Whistler. The strength and originality of these homegrown artists resulted in no small part from the very lack of that which their European-trained compatriots held in such high esteem: years of academic training in Europe drawing the figure. The psychic weight of the figurative tradition expounded in Paris, Munich, and London did not overburden the young Ryder and Blakelock, or the emerging Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, Ben Foster, and J. Francis Murphy. This was precisely the point Charles de Kay made in his crushing review of the 1884 Society of American Artists' annual exhibition, when he condemned Chase, George de Forest Brush, and Kenyon Cox for their ill-conceived figurative work, comparing them to "these foreign-taught youths, who so seldom appear to have anything to say, and who do not handle their brushes with that mastery which makes us prefer pigs in a sty from one man to the highest glories of earth and heaven from another."[99] Even with extensive exposure to foreign works, as was the case with Ryder who knew Corot and Monticelli though his dealer and friend Daniel Cottier, these indigenous artists manifest an aura of naiveté in their early work, something akin to dewy-eyed innocence and a certain homespun originality that appealed to buyers looking for an American art of a romantic and spiritual bent: a native profundity to counter the inroads of European savoir-faire.

Critics like de Kay and Clarence Cook wanted to be moved more than they wanted to be dazzled by academic finesse. The art public, and the professional or merchant class that made up the majority of buyers of American art, wanted sentiment that moved them, not just surface brilliance. The great American collectors of the Gilded Age, like William Evans, Thomas Clark, George A. Hearn, and John Gellatly wanted authentic native genius along the lines of Inness and Homer, Martin, Murphy, and Tryon, mystics and introspective souls who touched on the wellsprings of what Henry James had called "our moral consciousness." They bought out of genuine enthusiasm for the art, not for fashion or social credentials—the cachet so many collectors of European art coveted. They did not spurn figurative art but the vast majority of their holdings were landscapes. As figure painter Will Low found out to his chagrin, a distinctly American "originality" was becoming the necessary criterion of praise from the critics. Collectors and critics were willing to make allowances in terms of technical finesse and polish in pursuit of that most elusive goal: authenticity of spirit. Artists like Ryder and Blakelock, precisely because of their idiosyncrasies, their powerful drive to embody emotion in art, became templates of the outsider—the misunderstood temperamental genius, the naïf who embodied some prelapsarian innocence of affection. For the older generation, Inness had embodied this romantic ideal. Many others, too, among the younger generation of Tonalists born after 1840 were likewise rooted in the romantic poetry of Longfellow, Irving, and Poe, and in the writings of Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau. Something, too, of the mysterious moonlight of Washington Allston and the fading vestiges of Puritan probity in George Fuller found resonance in their rarefied precincts, especially in their early work of the 1880s and 1890s.

Albert Pinkham Ryder and Ralph Albert Blakelock are often viewed together in American art history as eccentric romantics, a characterization at odds with reality.[100] Their early connection in the public mind was probably due to Charles de Kay, who compared them in his early criticism of exhibitions of the Society of American Artists, even though they worked quite independently of one another. In twentieth-century art history their status as visionaries and proto-modernists has been justified by the myth of the outsider, which casts Ryder and Blakelock as radical artists living as recluses on the fringes of the Victorian mainstream. Their stylistic and technical innovations, sometimes brilliant, sometimes fumbling, certainly make them harbingers of modernism, but they were firmly part of the progressive Tonalist milieu of their day and friends and colleagues with the finest artists working in a similar mode. In addition, both had firsthand experience of all the most sophisticated examples of American and European art. Ryder and Blakelock were profoundly influential in the evolution of Tonalism, primarily as gifted experimenters reveling in tone in and for itself. Like Inness, some of their best work flowed from the very process of art-making, their tonal strategies not so much a means to an end, but the ultimate goal. Theirs was an art composed of imagination, memory, and sentiment rooted in the land of their childhood, their hopes, and their fleeting dreams.

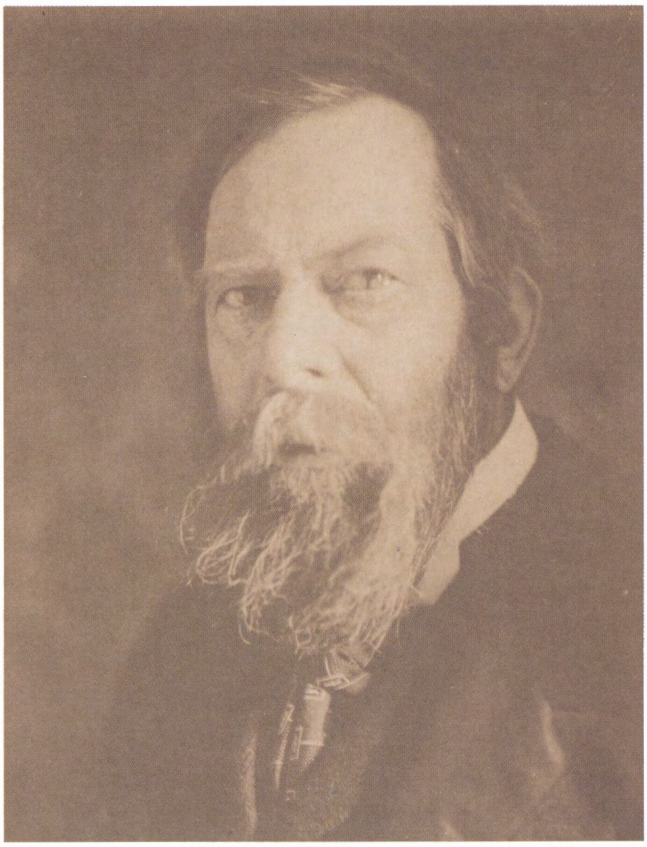


Fig. 4.46. Photograph of Albert Pinkham Ryder by Alice Boughton, c. 1905, Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847–1917)

Although Albert Pinkham Ryder (fig. 4.46) and Ralph Albert Blakelock were the same age, both born in 1847, it was Ryder who set the stage for American-trained Tonalists like Blakelock, by virtue of the experimental character, emotional complexity, and decorative beauty of his work. Charles de Kay assiduously constructed a school of criticism—if not taste—around his protégé Ryder, as Clement Greenberg would do a century later around Jackson Pollock. It is astonishing how this humble and rather fumbling painter from New Bedford was so quickly and decisively embraced by the progressive Gilder circle and made their exemplar of a new dyed-in-the-wool American art. Something in the man and his art caught their eye. Ryder, born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, retained much of the "independent" and laconic character of his native Cape Codders, a people not easily moved from their traditional ways. His brothers had fought in the Civil War. His art education in New Bedford and later at the National Academy School in New York was rather perfunctory, although his teacher at the National Academy, Lemuel Wilmarth, had studied in Munich and Paris, and, while primarily a still-life and genre painter, was capable of expressive landscape work. Draftsmanship, especially figure drawing, was never Ryder's forte, nor was the artist particularly interested in proving himself along traditional academic lines. But from his student days on, even fellow artists with strong technical abilities were drawn to Ryder, appreciating his instincts as a born colorist and painter of deep emotional power—for all his lack of traditional polish. Helena de Kay Gilder knew him as a fellow student at the academy (Ryder like Winslow Homer may well have been enamored of Helena), and he soon came to the notice of—and became friends with—John La Farge, Louis Comfort Tiffany, fellow New Englander Robert Swain Gifford, J. Alden Weir, William Gedney Bunce, and the sculptor Olin Warner, in addition to Helena's brother, Charles de Kay, who collected the artist while shamelessly promoting Ryder in the pages of the *New York Times*. All Ryder's friends and patrons were early members of the Society of American Artists and associated with the Gilder circle.

Ryder supported himself early on by painting decorative panels for the Scottish dealer Daniel Cottier, who would become Ryder's patron, dealer, and friend. Producing these works for Cottier, who sold the work of many French artists, especially Corot, Millet, Diaz, and Monticelli, Ryder developed a taste for decorative arrangements and, most crucially, for the translucent tonal glazes found in old master and Dutch paintings. The soft-edged rhythmic tonal harmonies of Corot also beguiled the shy New Englander. Ryder was included in the 1875 Cottier & Co. exhibition along with La Farge, Hunt, Helena de Kay Gilder, and others, a show that perfectly suited his growing feel for small decorative oils. Two years later when the founding membership of the Society of American Artists was being established by the Gilder circle, Ryder had already gained enough respect to be included, though not without some concern that his "coarsely finished," or unfinished-looking small landscapes and shaky drawing would cause the society trouble in the eyes of critics. In short order, Charles de Kay would take care of that concern in his glowing reviews of Ryder in the society's exhibitions. In fact, Ryder showed at the first nine exhibitions of the society from 1878 to 1887, a critical forum for the artist, as the writer William Crary Brownell pointed out in 1880: "If it had not been for the Society of American Artists it is doubtful whether such an unmistakably genuine painter as Mr. A.P. Ryder would ever have had his pictures hung where they could be seen."[101]

Charles de Kay was clearly besotted with Ryder and within a decade placed him on a pedestal as an iconic American original. Ryder's grounding in the experience of his native land was key to de Kay's enthusiasm. For all Ryder's idolizing of Monticelli, Corot, and the Dutch masters, his primary visual allegiance consisted of a visceral expression of wonder in the face of nature's colors and rhythms, a sentiment intensely visual, often fixed in memory or dreams, or percolating out of his literary imagination. His first love was the landscape of his childhood, which provided the enduring basis of his art. Ryder's discovery of this affinity, an epiphany of near-religious fervor, occurred when he began painting an early landscape and found that his métier was a broad and expressive style. "Three solid masses of form and color—sky, foliage and earth—the world bathed in an atmosphere of golden luminosity. I threw my brushes aside; they were too small for the work in hand. I squeezed out big chunks of pure, moist color and taking my palette knife, I laid on blue, green, white and brown in great sweeping strokes. As I worked I saw that it was good and clean and strong. I saw nature springing to life on my dead canvas. It was better than nature, for it was vibrating with the thrill of a new creation. Exultantly I painted until the sun sunk below the horizon, then I raced around the fields like a colt let loose, and literally bellowed for joy."[102] Ryder's youthful enthusiasm for "solid masses of form and color" echoed what was expressed in the art and writings of another New Englander, William Morris Hunt.

An early and astute Ryder biographer, Frank Jewett Mather, believed that Ryder, because of weak eyes due to a faulty childhood vaccination, developed a visual memory haunted by a residual repertoire of iconic images, afterimages of a sort that recurred from his early life. "Naturally he drifted into an owlish sort of life, wandering off into the moonlight at all hours and avoiding the glare of the high sun. The physical and moral solace of these moonlight strolls is a chief emotional content of his pictures. Indeed the forms of most of his compositions can be directly traced to such memories. His trees in their distortions and bold pattern are merely the windblown dwarf oaks of the Cape seen against an evening sky; his misshapen hulks are those obsolete carcasses that darkle on that little graveyard of ships, Crow Island; his misty stretches of calm water in moonlight washing the feet of shadowy dunes can be seen at South Dartmouth. . . . "[103] Whether Mather's interpretation of Ryder's imagery is precisely correct or not, it demonstrates the hold Ryder had on the imaginations of his patrons, especially in a work like *Fisherman's Hut*, undated (fig. 4.47), and the resonance his haunting portrayal of the American dreamscape found among early collectors.

Charles de Kay, a poet and novelist as well as a critic, clearly sensed Ryder's emotional connection with the land and its history, imagined or real. In 1879, de Kay commissioned Ryder to paint sixteen panels in a decorative cherrywood mirror (fig. 4.48) for his mother, Janet Halleck Drake de Kay, illustrating the famous poem "The Culprit Fay" by his grandfather, the Knickerbocker poet Joseph Rodman Drake. The Drake poem had been published in six editions by the 1880s and recounts the adventures of a fay, or fairy, who falls in love with a mortal woman and must undergo a series of nocturnal tasks, including washing his wings in the spray of a leaping Hudson River sturgeon, and relighting his lamp from a falling star. These and other moonlit trials are recorded in Ryder's small panel paintings, which include portraits of the poet and

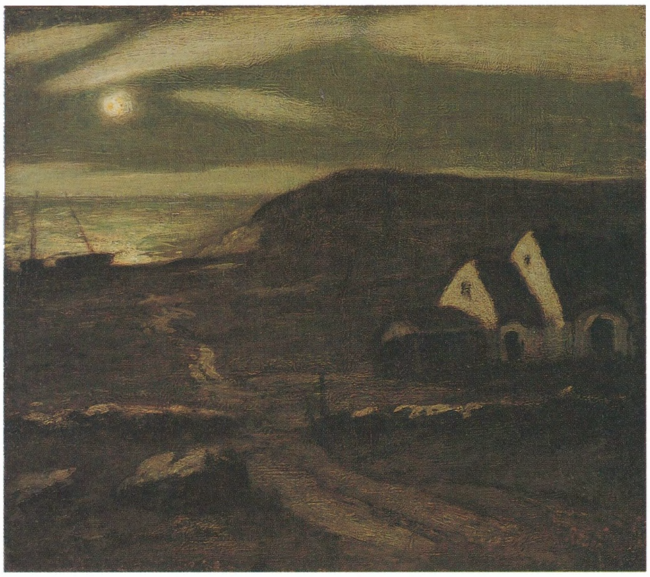


Fig. 4.47. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Fisherman's Hut*, undated. Oil on canvas, 12 ¼ x 14 in. Acquired 1920, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

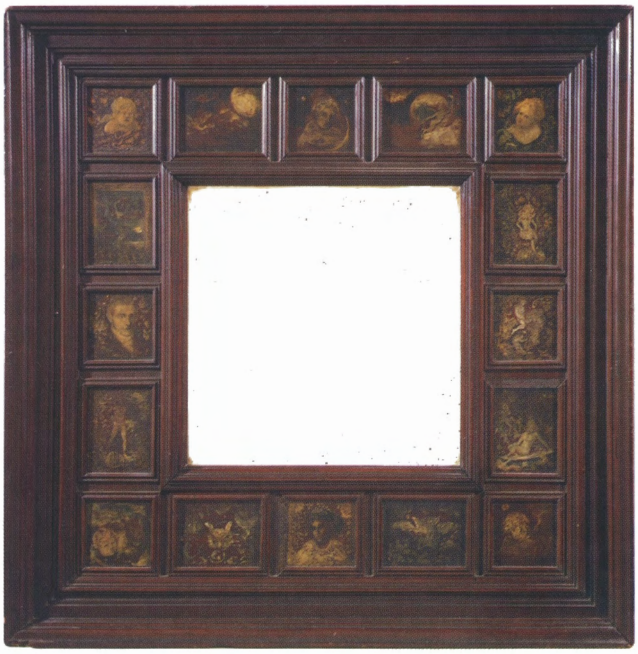


Fig. 4.48. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *The Culprit Fay*, c. 1882–86. Oil on wood, mirror frame, 16 panels, overall: 20 ¼ x 20 ¼ in. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Joan Whitney Payson Bequest 76.13.

de Kay's sister, Helena, whom Charles had lightly upbraided for failing to provide him and Ryder with a photograph to obtain a correct likeness.[104] Inspite of all his unevenness as a draftsman, de Kay found Ryder the perfect choice to embody his literary patrimony and its poetic associations with the Hudson River. The origins of the poem, "The Culprit Fay," had come about when Joseph Drake had taken a bet from one of his friends, possibly James Fenimore Cooper, that he could render the Hudson River with the same poetic charm as European poets had done for the Rhine. In charging Ryder with the task of illustrating his grandfather's poem, de Kay had, in a sense, brought the mingling of cultural waters full circle: engaging Ryder's native sensibilities to depict an American work of literature in a decorative scheme originating in Europe. Ryder's peculiar mystical bent was perfectly suited for creating a hybrid—at once American and yet evocative of old-master sensibilities—an artist who painted gemlike intimacies of his homeland veiled in sumptuous and exquisite tone, often glazed and varnished to the consistency of stained glass or lacquer work. De Kay was obviously enraptured with his protégé and was soon sharing his enthusiasm with his readers and fellow patrons. In Ryder, the romantic imaginings of the New World had become inextricably mixed with the immemorial vagaries of the Old World, a point de Kay underscored when he reviewed a Cottier exhibition and the actual "The Culprit Fay" he had commissioned. "An unexpected bit of fine painting is to be seen on the broad frame for a mirror which Mr. Albert Ryder has decorated for Cottier & Co. in little panels, each remarkable for its individual fantastic charm. This young artist is in appropriate company here, for his canvases offer a singular parallel in an American to the work of Monticelli."[105]

In his review of the Society of American Artists' annual exhibition in 1879, de Kay immediately substantiated his judgment and that of the society, addressing any lingering concerns that the public might take exception to Ryder's quirky technique and apparent naiveté. Speaking of Ryder's landscape *Spring* (see fig. 4.14), he commented that "for the majority of people it will seem wasted time to attempt to fix in words its singular and fresh charm. Like many of the modern painters, Mr. Ryder appears to be quite deficient in knowledge of the figure. He is an impressionist in so far as he strives for the 'feeling' of a figure rather than to express its anatomy in definite outlines … the artist is a colorist by nature, and in this country, that is a rare thing indeed."[106] De Kay's early use of the terms "impressionist" and "colorist," terms he would employ throughout his career as a critic, refer to the initial usage of "impressionist" in art circles, meaning a quick take, an expressive and sketchy rendering to capture the artist's feelings evoked by a scene—not the broken facture of Impressionism which ultimately became its meaning. It was in this first or original sense that Whistler was considered the first "impressionist" when his work was seen in America. The term "colorist," for de Kay, meant an artist who emphasized depiction in color form as opposed to line, and became synonymous in his critical vocabulary with Tonalist, as in this 1898 passage from a discussion of a Homer Dodge Martin painting in the collection of William Evans: "[i]t is the color he has put into the scene, the grave, rich, speaking color, which has an effect on the nerves like that of a well-played organ."[107] And again, "… in the subtle tone sonnets and lovely color reveries of the landscapes. … "[108]

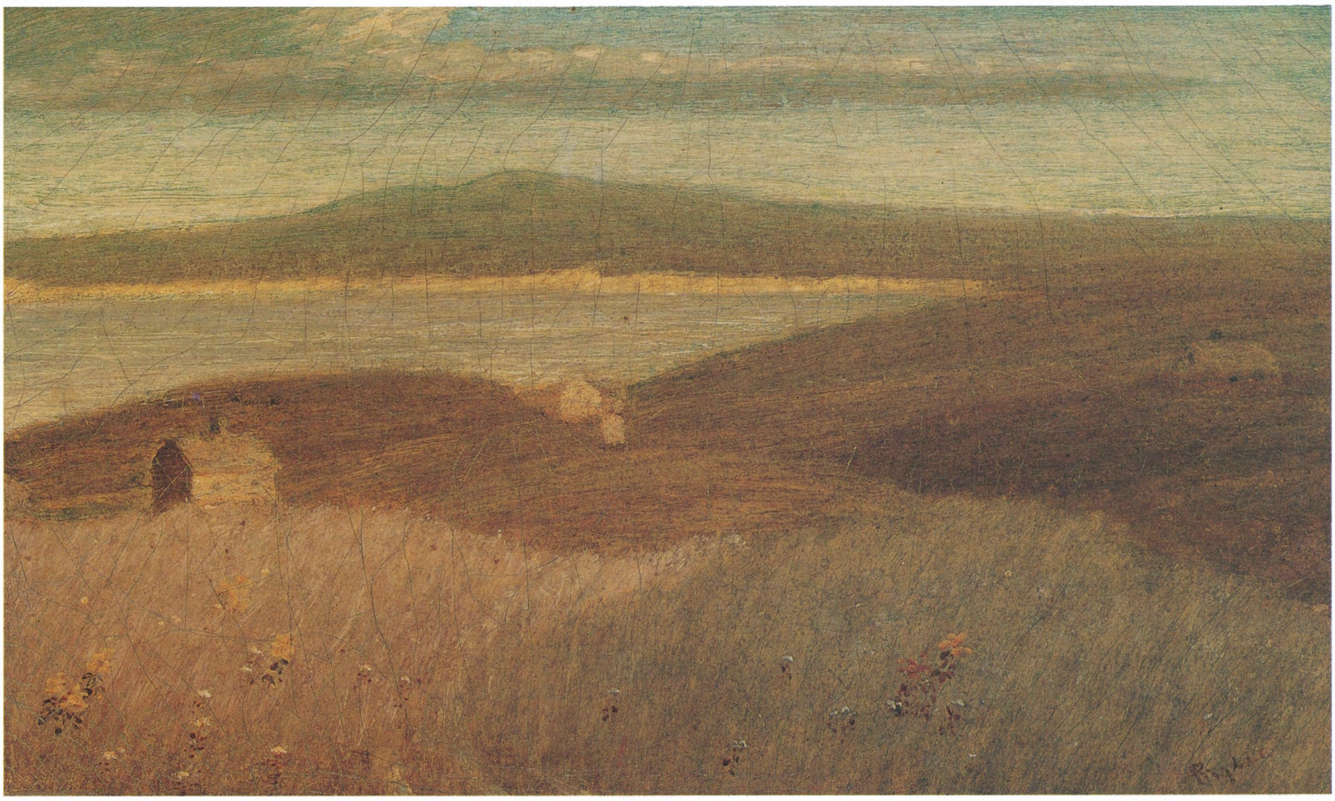


Fig. 4.49. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Gay Head*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas 7 ½ x 12 ½ in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

In taking up Ryder, de Kay was making the expressive skill of the artist—his profundity of expression—a litmus test for the cognoscenti, indulging the myth of the naive artistic genius, whose very eccentricity, freedom, and even dismissal of social norms, is key to his originality; who marches, in Thoreau's words, to a different drummer and whose very unorthodoxy connects with the wellsprings of the culture. De Kay had made a similar argument for artistic integrity in his seminal article on George Inness. "There remains the personality behind the artistic product. A painter deserving the name of artist works, consciously or unconsciously, from inner rules which he has, as it were, invented for himself. It is easily conceivable [sic] that he may be a great artist, and yet unequal in his work and genius, and surpassed by lesser men in deftness of hand."[109] De Kay's promotion of the outsider status of the true artist, who goes against society's grain in order to speak from the heart, is very much in keeping with later notions of modernism as a revolt against bourgeois values and the enshrining of the personal and authentic.

De Kay's new dispensation for native genius, of the great-souled artist, misunderstood by critics, oblivious to money and the marketplace, often in desperate straits, would color his criticism and gain momentum in his promotion of Ryder and Blakelock—just as he had done for Inness and Martin. De Kay was equally willing to give his imprimatur to the European-trained Americans as well, as long as they remained true to their American character, progressive ideas, and an allegiance to style and substance over sentimental cliché: an art that resonated with homeland values. Ironically, the arc of Ryder's creative drive took him on longer and longer flights of narrative fancy, to literary scenes of the Old World's past—including portrayals of figures—while the best of the returning artists from Europe gravitated increasingly to scenes of the near-at-home, discarding blatant storytelling and the inclusion of figures.

De Kay elaborated on Ryder's interior world in his review of the artist's work in the National Academy of Design annual exhibition of 1883. "An ideal woman from a poet's Utopia walks harp in hand through a landscape whose delicacy, richness, and quiet power of tone must be seen, and seen for a long while, to be rightly appreciated. It may be strong language to say that in these, perhaps the highest qualities of painting, Ryder is unequaled by any artist in Europe; but it is a fact that more and more artists and amateurs are awaking to every year. Singular that New York, the most bustling, hard-living City of the world, should produce the painter who is able, better than any other artist now before the public, to express these moods of infinite peace and of serene thoughtfulness in landscape."[110]

In a stark and simple landscape like *Gay Head*, circa 1890 (fig. 4.49), Ryder's underlying abstraction of soft-edged landforms is instantly apparent. The absence of figures or narrative reinforces the stark emptiness, giving a brooding quality to the rolling hills and curved shoreline, a kind of poetry of memory or loss. The miniature landscape of just 7½ by 12½ inches, typical of Ryder's intimate scale, embodies a poignant longing that appealed to the post–Civil War generation, of a private and introverted state of mind, a place of quiet where contemplation of loss or remembered joy might be rendered in glazed pigments and so preserved. This is an art of the personal, of the meditative soul, of the unseen spirit that haunts the land. Ryder's landscapes are metaphors of mood, dreamscapes overlaying the original recollections on which their creation was based—thoroughly self-contained and self-referencing. Or, as de Kay put it in 1898, describing the Ryders in the Evans collection: "Though they do not draw one quickly... [compared to traditional storytelling genre paintings], they hold one even more; so that one returns to them again and starts adreaming over them. What do they mean? Nothing—and everything!—according to the observer and his mood."[111]

The myth of Ryder constructed by de Kay and the Gilder circle, of an artist appearing full-blown on the art scene—seemingly out of nowhere—with his tiny jewel-like canvases, developed a seductive and perhaps self-fulfilling momentum. But it simply was not so. Ryder was steeped in modernism, influenced by the artists that surrounded him, by his travels in Europe, by the company of decorators like Cottier, Tiffany, and La Farge, with whom he was closely associated, as well as by his friendship with de Kay. Ryder must have known La Farge's small landscapes of the 1860s, which though more careful and academic in construction, show similar concern for delicate gradation in tonalities and underlying emotional states. Hunt's late landscapes, full of broad swatches of swirling pigment must have also found their way into Ryder's early landscapes, not to mention Hunt's *Talks on Art*, a manifesto that emphasized constructing paintings out of broad color masses. Currier's dazzling and abstract watercolors exhibited from 1879 on may well have been a liberating example to Ryder, encouraging a break with prevailing codes of precise finish.

Paradoxically, for an artist who was later revered for a homespun style of folksy veracity, Ryder's fascination with European models, especially old-master tone—the quality his wealthy collectors adored—was the very thing that ultimately got him into trouble in terms of technical execution. Ryder was utterly bewitched by the radiant tones in old Dutch paintings. His attraction to the timeless quality of deep-toned paintings triggered in Ryder a kind of mania for the manipulation of materials to obtain rare effects. In time, direct observation became subservient to memory and imagination, and then to an obsessive manipulation of his materials for its own sake. Decorative patterns and quality of color and tone became a never-ending quest. And it was these epic battles with unstable glazes that resulted in the long-term deterioration of many of his paintings.

Ryder lived his entire professional career in New York's Greenwich Village, occasionally taking long midnight walks along the New Jersey Palisades to observe the moonlight, or visiting with artist friends. In the confines of his small studio, surrounded by books, piled with accumulated trash and the remnants of meals, he labored over his tiny panels and canvases, sometimes for weeks and months, sometimes for years. He produced layer upon layer of pigments mixed with various mediums—varnish, linseed oil, alcohol, bitumen, and even wax—until he achieved a thick viscous surface quality and resonant tonality. Later interpreters of his work found in his obsession for overly labored surfaces a kind of quaintness or even a folk simplicity. But Ryder saw himself in the line of the old masters he loved, and behind the congenial facade of the laconic Cape Cod native was a fierce pride determined to fashion art that would stand up against the best history had to offer. Ryder wrote of his work: "It's only when you see my pictures in company with the old masters that you really feel what they are. It takes fine quality to not seem out of place in such company."[112] His single-minded drive and competitive instinct to improve on the Old World were very American, much in keeping with the nationalistic spirit of de Kay and William Evans and the Gilder circle. Critics, followed by buyers, began to covet Ryder's infinitely painstaking and exquisite paintings. The more esoteric, the more mysterious the subject, the more tantalizing to the fancy—so much the better, and the more the art world swooned.

As early as the 1879 society annual exhibition, a *Scribner's Magazine* critic—firmly on the Gilder bandwagon—noted Ryder's certain intent: "Mr. Ryder is evidently fully aware of his aim and of his own powers. If, in his passion for color, he neglects outline and drawing, it is not that he admires drawing less, but color more. His work is fascinating in the stricter meaning of the word, for it grows on the observer more and more, the oftener he sees it."[113] If critics such as de Kay at times dismissed technical masters like Eakins and Chase, it was often Ryder's rich tones, radical color, and throbbing emotion that were pointed out as the way of the future. From de Kay's perspective, Ryder had taken the examples of Jules Dupré's marines and Millet's humble yet bold imagery and made it his own, America's own.

A fervid group of admirers and wealthy collectors seized on Ryder, many willing to wait years to acquire his gemlike paintings of concentrated tone and dreamy luminosity. In an age of explosive wealth and materialism, the fascination with Ryder reflected an underlying need for a secular spirituality, for solace, for escape, for a vague if fervent faith that behind the veil of trial and tribulation there existed a better world. Ryder's art spoke to such needs. Art historian Elizabeth Broun has written, "Ryder's deep knowledge of literature and art—his ability to live in that world and draw comfort from it—gives his paintings a resonance that no one of his generation could match. For him, literature was alive with emotion, providing not just a picturesque subject but joy and release from pain.

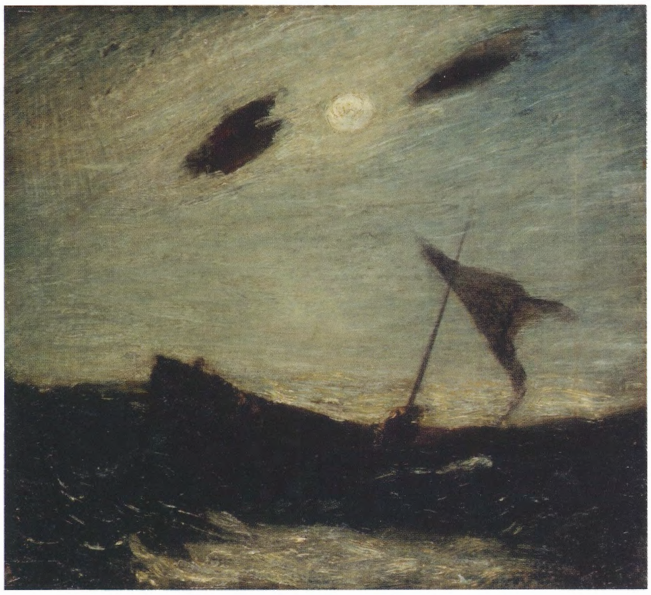


Fig. 4.50. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Moonlight*. c. 1887. Oil on mahogany, cradled, 15 ⅞ x 17 ¾ in. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC., gift of William T. Evans, 1909.10.2.

Apparently, he painted only when in this state of emotional investment, unable to 'go at a picture cold.'"[114]

Ryder painted some distinctly religious subjects, along with many works based in literature ranging from the Romantic poets to Shakespeare—all popular themes of the era—but his marines, moonlights, and pure landscapes (many of which have since deteriorated to parched shadows of their original splendor) dazzled his contemporaries, and later became icons to American modernists who treasured their formal values. The best work (and best preserved) has a concentrated power of tone, fantastic design, and scintillating surface textures. Although poetry and literature may have inspired Ryder's greatest creations, going against the non-narrative grain of the Tonalist landscape, rarely is the narrative apparent or, if it is, even necessary to the visual impact. Like the greatest poets, Ryder reduces the echoed emotion of the source to essences: showing and not telling. In *Moonlight*, circa 1887 (fig 4.50), the electrifying image is composed with scintillating warmth of tone, combining the opalescent blues of the sky with the reddish clouds, where the varnished mahogany panel is left exposed (a quintessential Whistlerian effect). The rhythmic abstraction of shapes, clouds, moon, shredded sail, and splintered mast have a raw elemental simplicity. The present good condition of *Moonlight* is a result of the forthright speed of its creation aboard ship as the artist was returning from a trip to England and could not produce the multiple glazes that were subject to deterioration. As in his greatest paintings, *Moonlight* works on many levels: effulgent in the vibration and refraction of tone, replete with a symbology both literal and latent, and embodying subliminal ideas that are all the more profound and powerful for their unconscious or instinctual realization. Ryder, too, delves into Inness's penumbral boundary zone, of "things unseen"—of time suspended in quietude, especially in moonlight when symbolic form strikes a most telling note.

Weir's Orchard, circa 1890 (fig. 4.51), displays Ryder's use of inviting earthy tones. Pinpricks of meadow flowers fill the foreground, while the middle-ground trees, soft edged and delicately blurred, are deployed for rhythmic grace, their topmost braches woven into a grayish blue sky. The depth of emotion invested in such a scene is captured in a letter Ryder wrote to his friend Weir about his stay at the farm. "I have never seen the beauty of spring before; which is something I have lived and suffered for. The landscape and the air are full of promise. That eloquent little fruit tree that we looked at together, like a spirit among the more earthly colors, is already losing its fairy blossoms, showing the lesson of life; how alert we must be if we would have its gifts and values."[115]

Ryder's heartfelt words offer a glimpse into the depth of spiritual reciprocity a Tonalist artist derived from the landscape, seeing there not just the cycles of life and its human analogue but an injunction to pause and ponder and celebrate. Thoreau's journals are filled with similar observations and injunctions: what is creation without mankind to enjoy its fruits; or, as the Transcendentalists well understood, beauty unobserved and unloved is beauty empty and barren. Eliot Clark, writing of the late paintings of J. Francis Murphy, phrased this as "the skillful picture maker finally discovering that in landscape man sees but the reflection of himself."[116]

In lesser hands these sentiments become pure sentimentality, nostalgic and vaguely picturesque. But in Ryder, as with Inness and Whistler, they are the quiddity that is translated into art, and refined again at fever pitch. Ryder's greatest marines, like *Moonlit Cove* circa 1885 (fig. 4.52), compare with Whistler's Nocturnes in their haunting dreamy rhythms, elegance, and enchanting patterns and—as Whistler insisted art should be—are simply beautiful as delicately arranged shapes and subtly applied colors and tones. Ryder's small scale, exquisite equilibrium of forms, and decorative sensibility fit the mold of Aesthetic Tonalism prevalent in the Society of American Artist circles in the 1880s and 1890s. The collecting frenzy and extravagant prices for Ryder at the turn of the century and after, which will be explored in more detail in the following discussion, was similar to the price rises for Inness, Martin, Wyant, and then Blakelock in the same period. By the turn of the century, the art for art's sake philosophy, rooted in the 1880s and 1890s, had engendered a kind of speculative boom for the precious object as object: a fetishist's lodestar for tiny exquisite works by artists already acknowledged as American masters.

But Ryder's inspiration to generations of modernists from Marsden Hartley and Jackson Pollock to Wolf Kahn is based more on the formal values expressed in his fissured surfaces: the expressionist gesture of his brushstroke and the Whistlerian

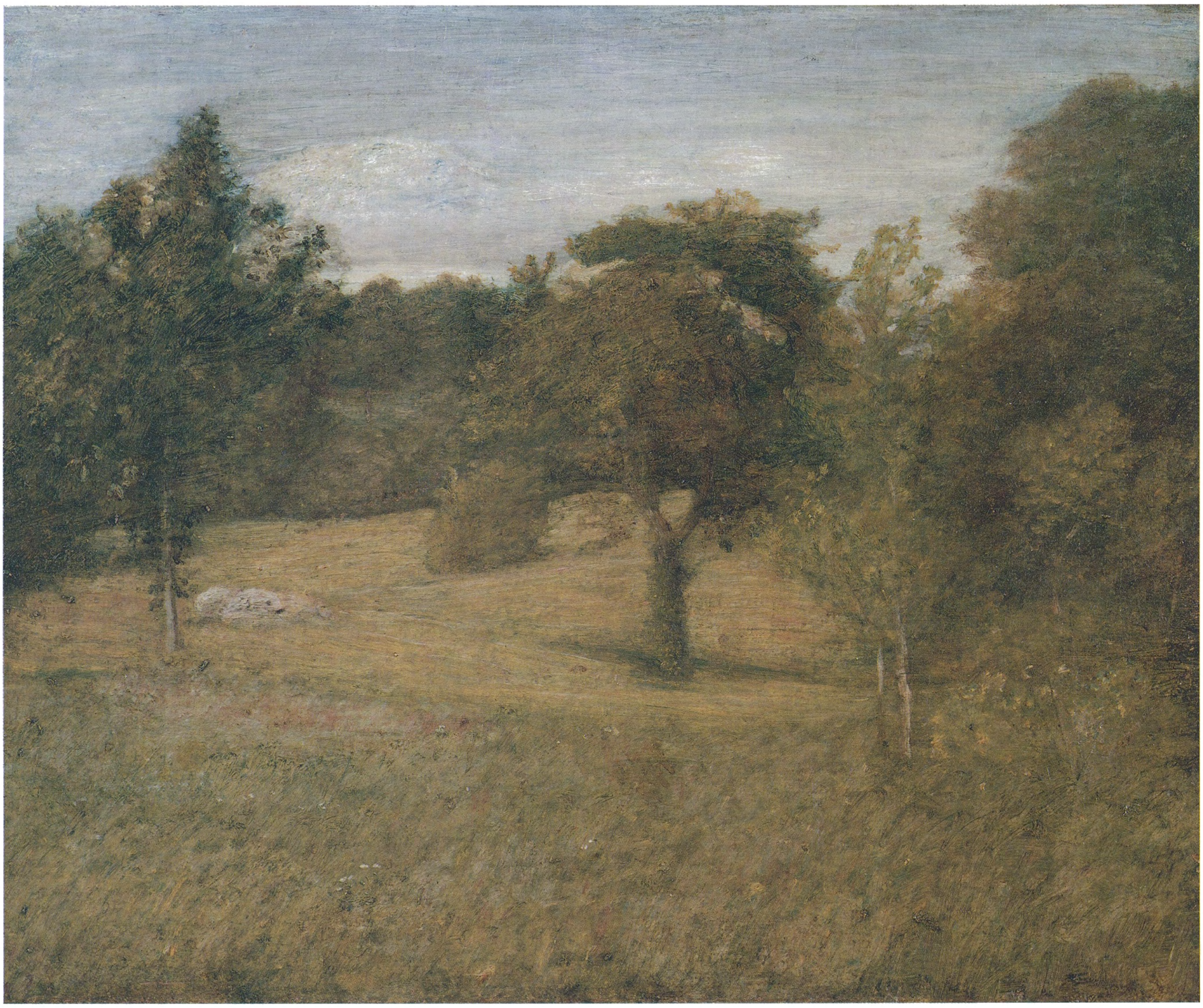


Fig. 4.51. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Weir's Orchard*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 17⅛ x 21 in. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

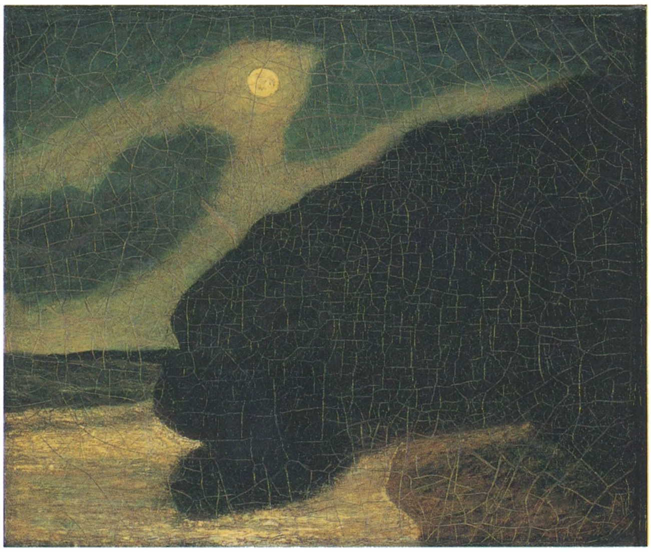


Fig. 4.52. Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Moonlit Cove*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 14⅛ x 17⅛ in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

reduction to telling essentials. Because the modernist myth of Ryder required his culling from the Victorian mainstream, perhaps including him with Poe or Whitman as anti-establishment outsiders, he was easily appropriated by later artists, scholars, and critics for their own purposes. Ryder became a lonely outpost in the origins of the avant-garde heritage. In addition, Ryder's peculiarities, his status as solitary pathfinder, made him a template of rare ingrained American authenticity. Few after 1930 grasped how deeply the artist's modernity—his conceptualist mode of creating—was very much a product of his time, and shared by many of his colleagues. If anything, Ryder's true Americanness was to be found in his unrelenting drive to reinvent himself.

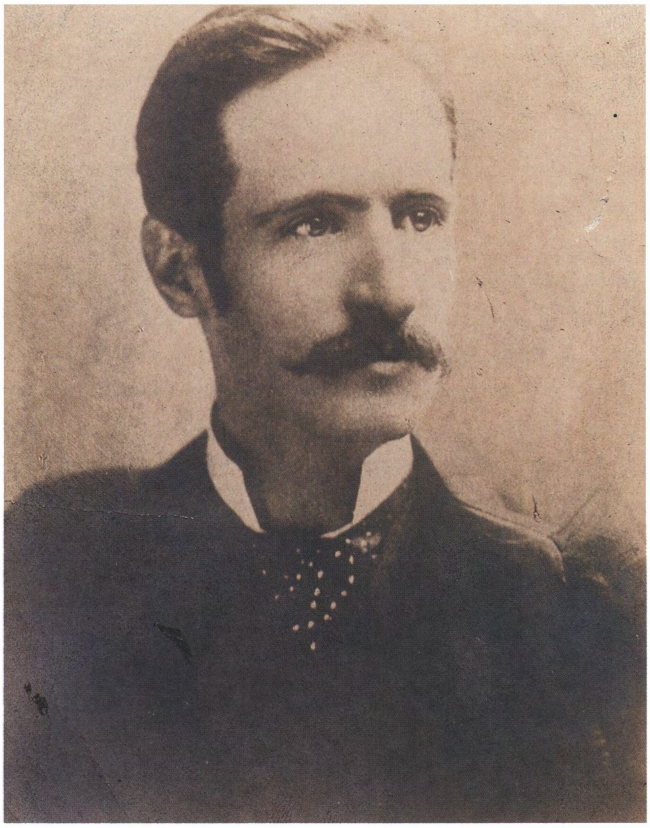


Fig. 4.53. Photo-illustration of Ralph Albert Blakelock, c. 1870. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847–1919)

Ralph Albert Blakelock, like Albert Pinkham Ryder, with whom he is often paired, has been cited by modernists as an example of a Victorian outsider who worked in a hauntingly Gothic-Romantic vein and tapped into an underground current of American reverie and nostalgia along the lines of Poe and Longfellow. In this notion a certain truth has generated both myth and misunderstanding. Of all the Tonalists, Blakelock (fig. 4.53) was probably the most eccentric, the least inclined to join groups, and probably the worst businessman (although he worked assiduously to sell his paintings) and manager of his own affairs. Disorganized and preoccupied with money anxieties and a growing family, Blakelock never quite fitting in with the tight confraternity of New York artists, or winning a membership at the National Academy (he was belatedly voted a member in 1916 when the fashion for Blakelock was at its peak) or at the Society of American Artists (where he gained early accolades from Charles de Kay). Even so, Ryder circulated freely in the New York artistic community and was admired by many, though he was never an insider. Blakelock's weakness, his inability (or bad luck) to manage a conventional life, was also his strength as an artist; his fevered mind—by the 1890s touched with incipient schizophrenia—drew him to religious speculation, music, theater, poetry, and deep into the visual splendors of nature. He viewed the world in unusual and quirky ways: he saw art in everything. Blakelock also differed from his colleagues in being college educated; he was particularly well read and mathematically astute. Out of this bubbling cauldron of enthusiasms and talents, Blakelock created some of the most truly radical art of the nineteenth century.

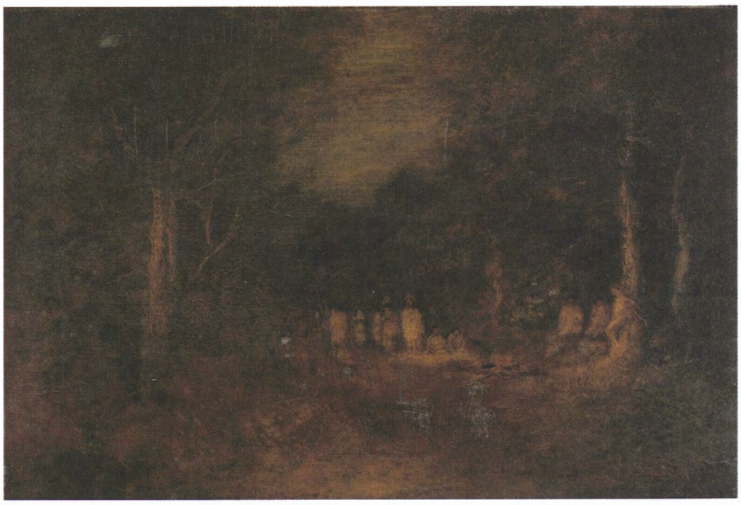


Fig. 4.54. Ralph Albert Blakelock, *The Captive*, 1879. Oil on canvas, $15\frac{15}{16}$ x $23\frac{13}{16}$ in. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Charles A. Schieren, 05.86.

Blakelock was another protégé of de Kay, who was probably responsible for the early pairing of Ryder and Blakelock in critical reviews, a pairing that has lingered ever since in the public mind and academic literature, even though Blakelock did not know Ryder and claimed not to have been influenced by his work. De Kay had spotted Blakelock's *The Captive*, 1879 (fig. 4.54), skied in the shadowy recesses of the 1879 National Academy of Design annual exhibition. Always looking for an excuse to disparage the National Academy, de Kay began his review in a rather dark lecturing tone about the mistaken purchases by "large buyers" he had detected in the exhibition, men who "have more money to spend than time to consider what they really wish to buy ... who buy pictures on the name of the artist rather than in answer to some appeal the individual picture makes to the nature of the purchaser." For the chosen few whose changing taste "turns them to fresh fields and pastures new," de Kay singled out two paintings by Blakelock. One of these was "'The Captive,' too high up, indeed, for any but telescopic eyes to be quite sure of its beauty, but still possessed of sufficient inherent force to suggest that something fine is being wasted on the upper spaces of the room ... The figures are in keeping with the subdued russet tones of the woodland view, and the whole suggests Diaz or even Monticelli. Perhaps a closer resemblance may be found nearer home, namely, to the poetic idylls in paint of Albert Ryder."[117] Although *The Captive* has a narrative basis, a fair maiden's abduction by Indians, the narrative is implicit and the real subject is the mysterious American wilderness of legend and memory.

Blakelock had been exhibiting Hudson River landscapes at the National Academy since 1868, but between 1874 and 1878 had failed to gain acceptance for his paintings, probably because in the 1870s the artist was already experimenting with expressive and unconventional brushwork and suggestive form; he showed from an early age a precocious ability to manipulate paint in daring ways. Blakelock's conversion in 1879 to the Tonalist style of moody and intimate, broadly painted landscapes seems to have been either a calculated move to end a drought of acceptances at the academy—and so join the insurgent modernists on the cusp of their triumph over the established Hudson River School—or an intuitive revelation that Tonalism fully engaged the artist's latent disposition to decorative and symbolic abstraction, to which Blakelock clung with deep conviction. His wife recalled him repainting *The Captive* many times and finally settling on a version using rich tone, the beginning of a conceptualist strategy that he would increasingly employ as the years went by.[118]

Blakelock could hardly have been unaware of the controversies swirling around the National Academy and the formation of the Society of American Artists, or have failed to see the expressive works by J. Frank Currier and John Twachtman, in addition to George Inness's 1878 manifesto on expressive art or Hunt's widely read and discussed *Talks on Art*. The more subjective and expressive Tonalist mode suited Blakelock's dreamy personality as well as the artist's facile technique, which lent itself both to chameleon-like imitation and genuine experimental flair, especially the love of worked surfaces and glowing tone, something Blakelock certainly shared with Ryder, whether in imitation or not. These were qualities that de Kay immediately recognized in Blakelock's first appearance at the society in 1880, when the artist was thirty-one. "The best piece by this young artist is a wood interior, with an Indian not very distinct, which is strongly imitative of Diaz. It is quite a charming little landscape, the sky being especially deep and fine in tone. Mr. Blakelock appears to be groping around for some one to follow as a pupil, but since he as a great imitative faculty, he will have to be very careful not to get into some mannerism from which there may be no recovery."[119]

Such praise from de Kay (who also singled out Ryder, Twachtman, Henry Muhrman, and mature artists like Robert Swain Gifford and Alexander Wyant) and acceptance by the elite society and the Gilder circle, conferred progressive status and were keys, ultimately, to sales. Confirmed in his turn to Tonalism, Blakelock resisted any return to an old-fashioned overt narrative style, and began increasingly to indulge his penchant for lyrical nostalgia, much of it drawn from memory and reverie of his earlier days in the West (1869–70, 1871). The artist began distilling bookish flights of fancy with newfound visceral delight in the twilit suburban landscapes near his home in Orange, New Jersey, where he had settled with his growing family. In the early 1880s, when his reputation was on the rise among astute collectors, he found himself in congenial company in terms of stylistic affinities. Many of his fellow artists who worked in nearby studios, like Charles Melville Dewey, J. Francis Murphy, and George Inness, were firmly of the Tonalist persuasion—and making a living from it. When Blakelock's signature style of scintillating moonlights and sumptuously intricate silhouetted tree patterns emerged in the mid-1880s, it was very much in keeping with the Tonalist modes of the period, especially the Aesthetic Tonalism fostered by the Art Students League and the Society of American Artists. Apparently galvanized by the acclaim of critics like de Kay and exemplars like Inness, Blakelock developed more and more complex orchestrated surface textures and fantastically designed compositions, which resulted in his signature style of moonlit streams and Indian encampments. Blakelock's nocturnes were less about particular places and more projections of inner states—the unseen but felt—filtered through the lyrical haze of memory.

In a review of the 1883 National Academy annual exhibition, de Kay again compared Ryder with Blakelock, "as usual, close behind him with a very smooth, pure, and sufficiently rich landscape containing a wigwam and small figures of Indians. A little prettier, a little smaller of mood, and possibly a little more knowing in technique, or, let us say it, a little smarter than Ryder, this able young artist offers a woodland and sky that are delightful to the vision."[120] The following year at the controversial 1884 society exhibition, Blakelock won highest praise from de Kay for, "a finely luminous ideal landscape and a rich wooded scene like an enamel [both owned by collector Thomas B. Clark], which show his genuine love for tones."[121] No higher accolades than a "genuine love for tones" could be bestowed by de Kay, who in the same review excoriated William Merritt Chase and his followers for lack of grace, beauty, or sentiment. It was in this society exhibition that the conservative critics singled out Ryder and Blakelock as radical colorists, a description that remained attached to these painters years after their art had become mainstream. As noted earlier, the term "colorist" was a virtual synonym for Tonalist. Other critics on the Gilder circle bandwagon, like Clarence Cook at the *New York Tribune*, called Blakelock's landscapes, "the best work of his which we have seen, marked not only by rich coloring, but by the possession of a distinctive character."[122] By 1886, Blakelock, Ryder, and the American-trained Tonalists like Murphy, Charles Warren Eaton, and Leonard Ochtman were the rising young Turks among the indigenous Americans, showing to good advantage alongside the technically astute foreign-trained artists and society insiders like Twachtman, William Sartain, and Hugh Bolton Jones.

In the period extending from 1879 to the artist's institutionalization for schizophrenia in 1899, Blakelock's Indian

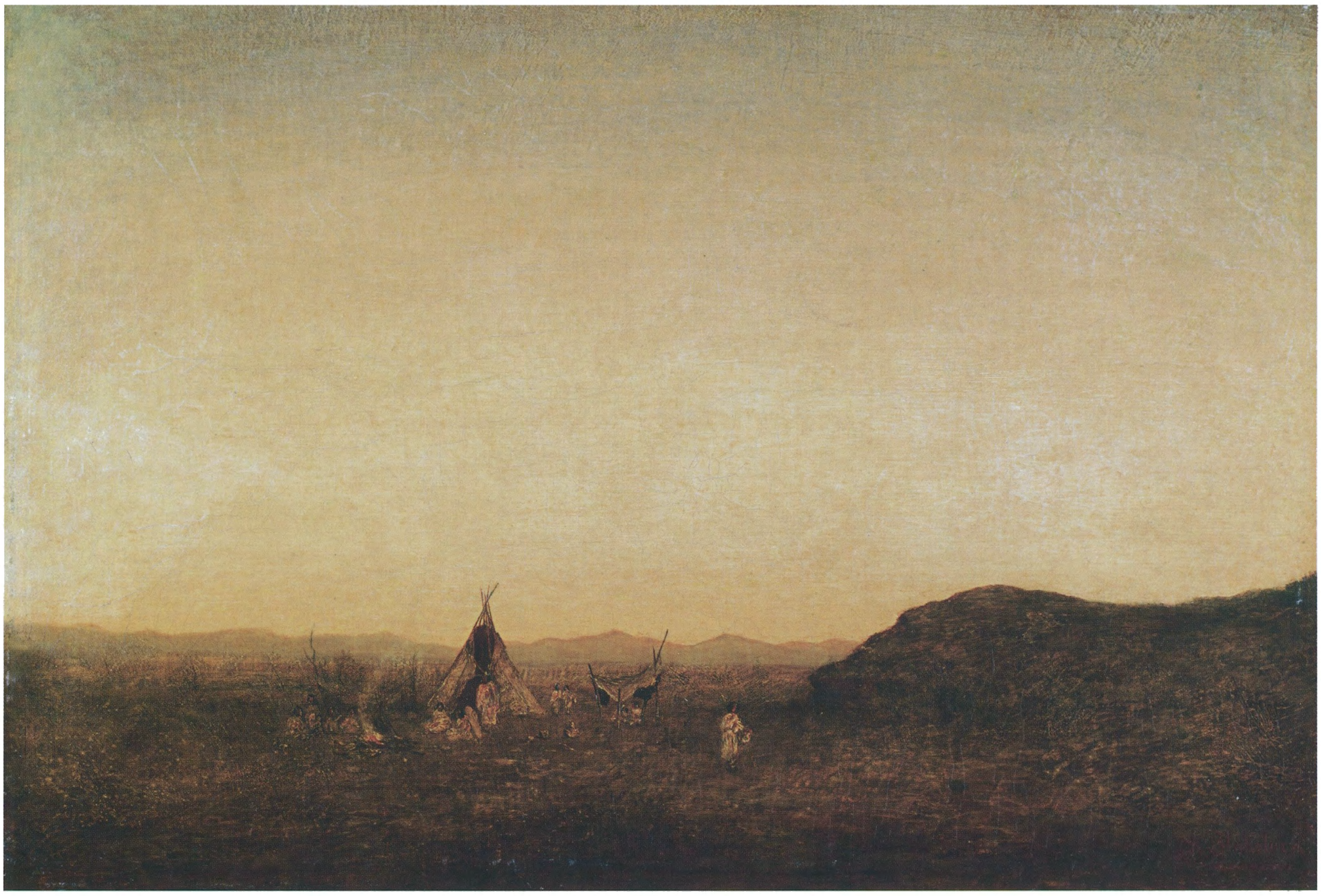


Fig. 4.55. Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Indian Camp*, c. 1871. Oil on canvas, 16 ½ x 24 ½ in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

paintings, moonlights, and pure landscapes were charged with the peculiar mystery of a fading dream, of a failure of innocence, of shattered expectations—a romanticism abetted by the closing of the frontier and poems like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. Blakelock, like many of his generation, turned inward to spiritualism, indulged his love of music, and frequented Swedenborgian circles. He had been too young to fight in the Civil War, but he knew something of its horrors and certainly the pall of disillusionment in its wake. The introspection that seems to fill his paintings was a shared low-level grief that many in his generation experienced for the soldiers who failed to return, the lives unled, the ugly business of Reconstruction left incomplete—and most of all, for the rapid speed of change that threatened to steamroll the world as it had once been.

Blakelock had traveled to the West in his youth and had witnessed the vanishing world of the Plains Indians. Even his early paintings derived from this experience, such as *Indian Camp*, c. 1871 (fig. 4.55), partake of a near-mystic wonder at the vastness and emptiness of the West in the last years before it was to be transformed by the impact of settlers from the East. The tepee and paint-notes that constitute Indian figures seem mere wraiths or tokens of a passing way of life, while the far reaches of the twilit sky and the loneliness of the landscape have far more emotional impact than the anthropological recording of detail. This paean to a life lived close to the land forever impelled Blakelock's finest art. In later years, something of his abiding nostalgia for that lost world of his youth was captured in an anecdote told by his friends and his studio mate, Henry Watrous, who found him one day at the piano in his studio tapping out an Indian dance, playing the tune over and over again. An unfinished canvas of dancing Indians was nearby. As Watrous entered the studio, Blakelock swung around and exclaimed: "Do you think that will make 'em dance?" And Blakelock pointed out the picture of the dancing Indians: "I've been trying to make 'em dance all day, and now I think I've got 'em going."[123] Blakelock seemed to be indulging himself in sympathetic magic, seeking in the music at his rhythmic fingertips the inspiration to complete the painting at hand: a flow of pure emotion channeled by memory and imagination to embody feelings for a culture that was superbly adapted to the pristine wilderness. Blakelock's Indians, bathed in misty gloom and moonlight are the fading metaphors of a vanished past—and the artist's own fleeting youth. While many of his returning colleagues from Europe had found charm in the antique ways of Breton peasants, Blakelock was mirroring his nostalgia for the aboriginal ways of a disappearing America. Blakelock's affection for these people is akin to the feeling

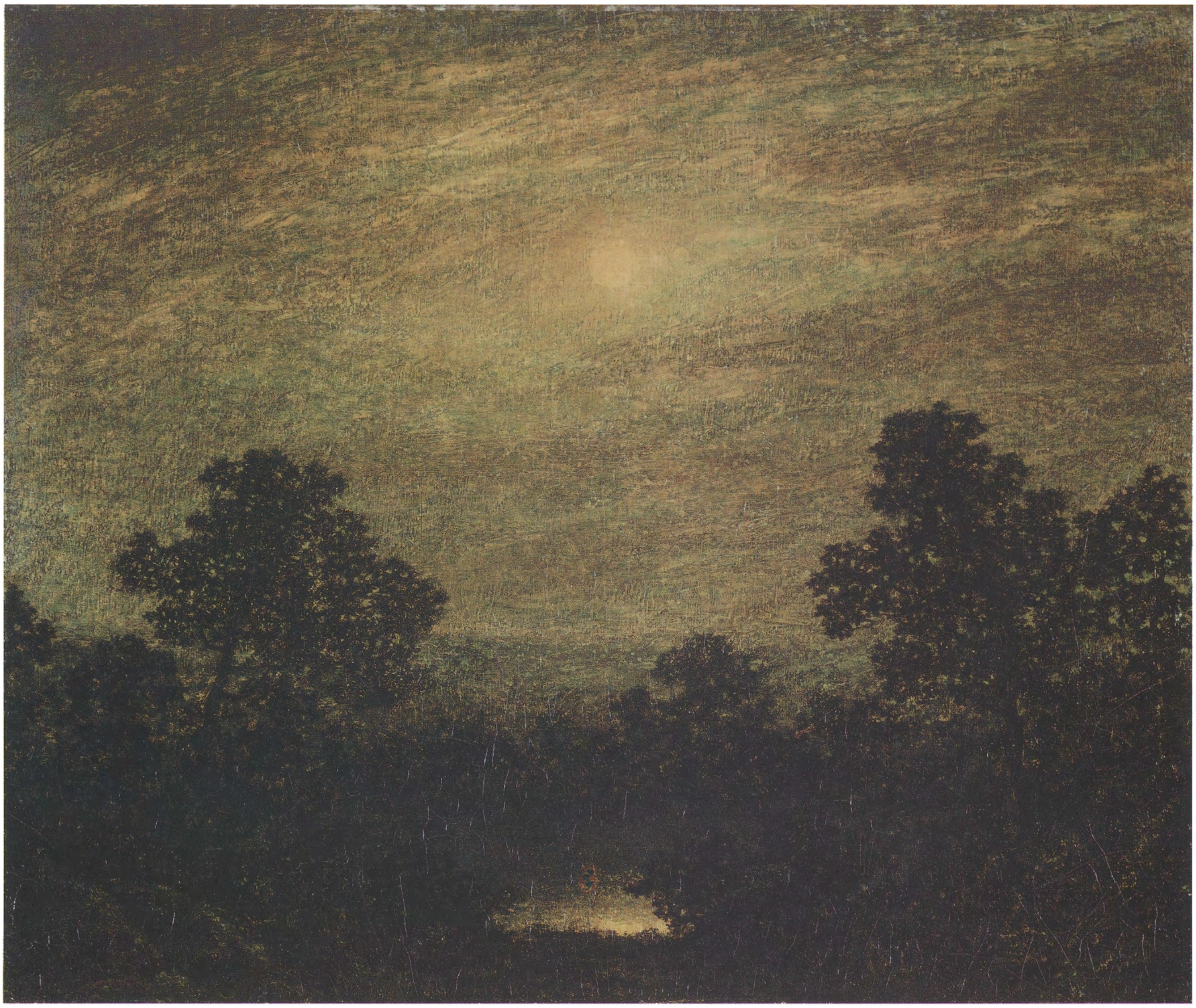


Fig. 4.56. Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Brook by Moonlight*, 1890–91. Oil on canvas, 72 x 48 in. in. Toledo Museum of Art. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Drummond Libbey, 1916.

Millet conveyed for the majesty and immemorial struggle of the French peasants he painted. Thoreau, too, had been haunted by the Indians who had once inhabited Concord. In the 1840s and 1850s, he explored his native ground for signs of their culture, for their arrowheads and lore, as if to recapture something of the Indians' spiritual valence with nature—the thing most precious in himself, finally traveling to Missouri in search of the remnants of their lost world. Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West shows and the Chicago World Fair's display of various native cultures in 1893 were contemporary manifestations of America's love-hate reading of its Indian past. It is little wonder that de Kay and the Gilder circle found in Blakelock's imagery the makings of a national art, something akin to Henry James's "moral consciousness" and "spiritual lightness."

When inspired and undistracted, free of the financial need to produce potboilers, Blakelock could create landscape masterpieces of rare distinction. From 1886, when his moonlights began to catch on in art circles, Blakelock merged into the mainstream of the Tonalist movement and established a scintillating presence outside the Ryder orbit on the New York art scene. Both Thomas Clark and William T. Evans, the great Tonalist collectors of American art, began to purchase his work. Although Blakelock would become revered for his haunting signature-style moonlights—intricately patterned leafage against a silvery backdrop—and the twilights and sunsets which constitute almost two-thirds of his landscapes,[124] his great originality lies less in his imagery and more in his fantastic surface textures and technical advances in manipulating pigments and grounds.

Brook by Moonlight, 1890–91 (fig. 4.56), is emblematic of the lacelike branching effects and luscious richness of tone that Blakelock achieved at his best. Here was the template imagery that first brought the artist major collectors and resulted in his market-apotheosis after 1910, and in the scurrilous imitators and forgers that diluted his legacy. The source of the motif lies in memory and imagination, while the technical accomplishment emerges out of Blakelock's often unique procedures of picture making. Whereas Ryder built up his surfaces with innumerable layers of glaze, repeatedly scraping out and building back, Blakelock often created his surfaces by building up layers of hard pigment and scraping them down, whittling away at them to get texture and muted color. The suggestive result provided him with the starting point of a motif, which, on any given day, might strike his fancy and move him to elaboration and further experiment. Norman Geske, eminent Blakelock scholar and head of the Blakelock Inventory at the University of Nebraska, has commented that Blakelock's open-air landscapes constitute the painter's most original contributions to American art, standing "apart from his trademark subjects and … forecast … a sensory experience of phenomena that is distinctly in advance of the conventional practice of his day."[125] From the mid-1880s on, Blakelock's landscape imagery evolved out of the process of preparing his canvases—a near-conceptualist approach, as opposed to the traditional manner of imposing the motif on an empty ground. The texture of his scraped and pumiced surfaces inspired form and color combinations, the variegated canvas or panel ground often guiding where on the support the artist established his landscape planes, foreground, middle ground, horizon, and sky.

A Tonalist colleague, Elliott Daingerfield, wrote that Blakelock's subject matter became embodied in the surface, like frieze work saturated with pigment. "When the silvery ground of his picture was hard and dry, he floated upon it more forms, using thin paints much richer in quality of color. When partially dry these were flattened with a palette knife, the forms brought into relief by subtle wipings, and once more allowed to dry. This process was repeated frequently, and then when the surface became … over glazed, he reduced it by grinding with pumice stone. The effect of this would bring the under silver of his first impasto into view, and with this key … he developed his theme, drawing with the darker and relieving with the under paint."[126] In this radical fashion, Blakelock achieved much the same effect as Whistler in exposing his ground or having it bleed though to the surface—giving harmony and shimmering vibrant tones—but in Blakelock, the manipulations are often achieved mechanically, endowing his imagery with an inimitable rawness and time-shorn serendipity.

In *Nocturne*, circa 1890s (fig. 4.57), the result of Blakelock's manipulation is a kind of landscape palimpsest of overwritten layers, resulting in a weathered and elemental image surviving the many erasures. Blakelock's prepared canvas and panels would sometimes take weeks, even months and years, to reach a salutary stage of development, or when Blakelock's moment of whimsy might catch them up. His long-suffering wife, Cora,

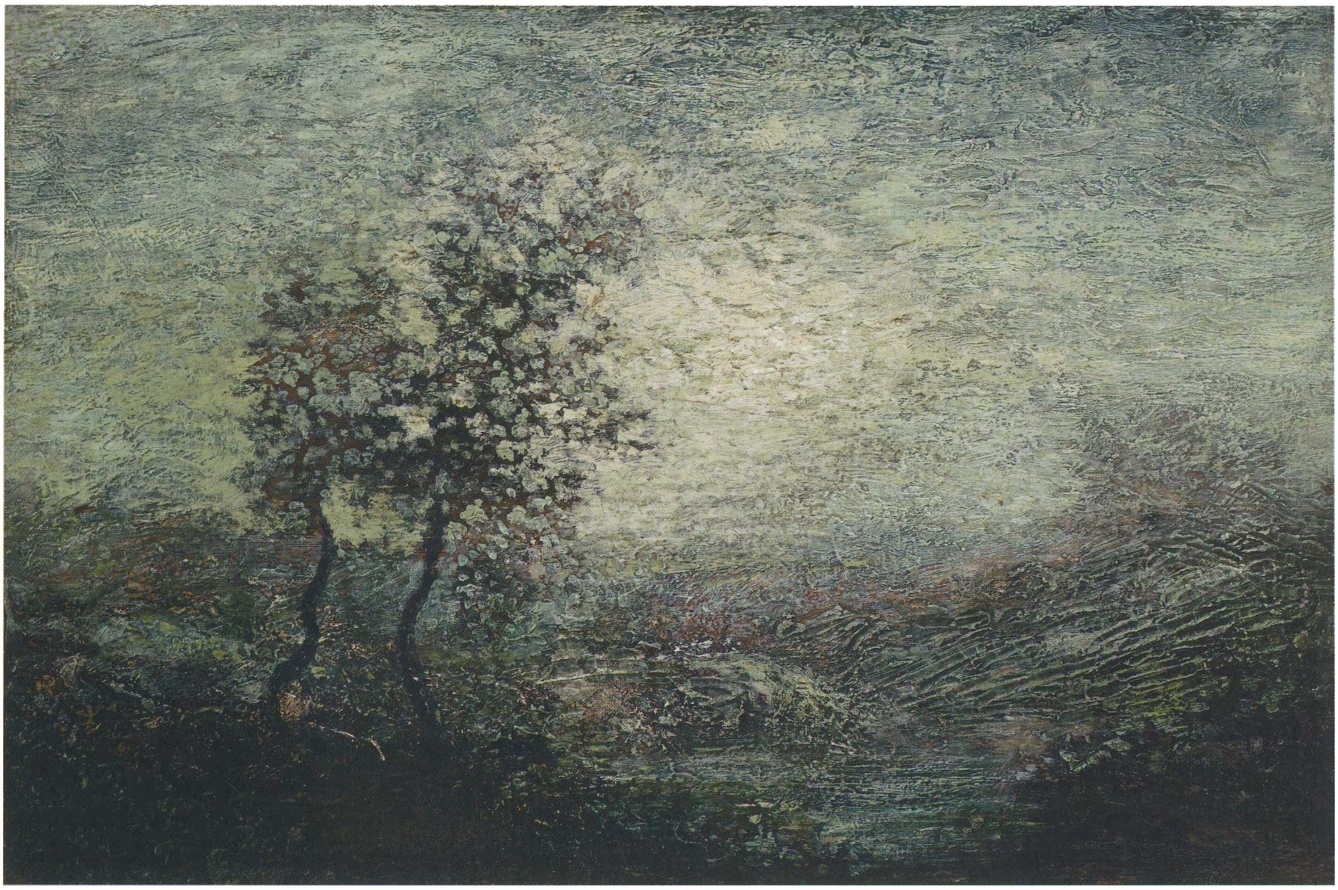


Fig. 4.57. Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Nocturne*, c. 1890s. Oil on board, 7 ⅞ x 11 ¾ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

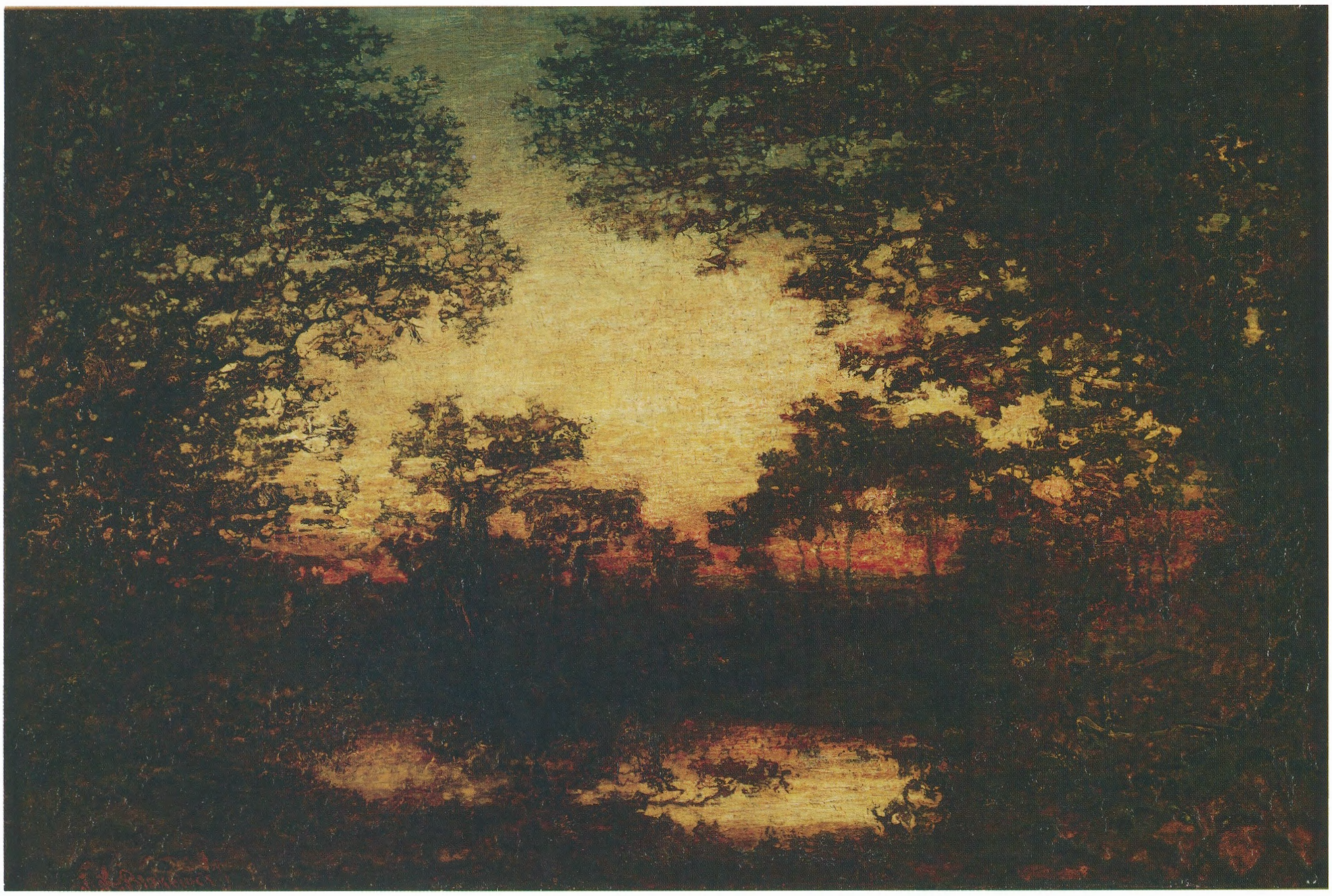


Fig. 4.58. Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Twilight Mood*, c. 1890s. Oil on board, 16 x 24 in. Private collection of Dr. Ronald J. Sollitto.

remembered these beginnings lying around the studio waiting for the moment of inspiration to catch her husband's eye; Blakelock never forgot a canvas, seeminged to bide his time for the right mood to give the appropriate support its final shape. Blakelock was a talented pianist and often claimed that the process of painting was akin to the composing of music; his surfaces reward close inspection with their interplay of color, tone, and form, full of subtle vibration and haunting refracted edges, jagged rhythmic patterns and dissonant harmonies that defy traditional pictorial analysis.

To the modern eye, Blakelock's surfaces are a marvel of sympathetic form. They are replete with analogues to nature's underlying armature, or more precisely with the organic structure visible on the microscopic level of cellular formation, or writ large in the more apparent structures of the biosphere, from plant morphology to animal physiology and geologic structures. Even the mathematics of fractals seems to come into play for some of Blakelock's branching tree forms and pattern-lit skies, especially the manner in which the fragmented geometric shapes, which grow one out of the other, give the appearance of repeated approximations of a primary or mathematically generated structure. Whether Blakelock's knowledge of mathematics informed his fascination with organic structure, guiding his hand intuitively or otherwise, may never be determined. But this uncanny equivalence in his fractal imagery and surface patterns, the haunting correspondences between parts, give his art an allure that goes far beyond his purely sensuous subject matter (*Twilight Mood*, c. 1890s, fig. 4.58). The abraded, scraped, striated surfaces, which resemble the eroded faces of sedimentary rocks and weathered driftwood, were probably less the result of a serendipitous process and more a conscious approximation of the natural phenomena that Blakelock's exquisite sensitivity would have found appealing. The artist's wife and daughter both related a similar story of Blakelock being captivated by the look of the worn enamel of a bathtub, and the way in which the negative and positive aspects of the abraded patterns inspired one of his moonlights.[127] Blakelock's wife, Cora, described an artistic temperament that missed nothing of value. "He saw pictures everywhere, in an old board, a piece of rusty tin, a stone, in every thing he could see a picture."[128] Only Thoreau in his journals has produced verbal equivalents based on similar visual acuity and the search for connective pattern—colorful word approximations of nature's most intimate facades: "The clear wholesome color of shrub oak leaves, so clean and firm, not decaying, but which have put on a kind of immortality, not wrinkled and thin like the white oak leaves, but full-veined and plump, as nearer earth. Well-tanned leather on the one

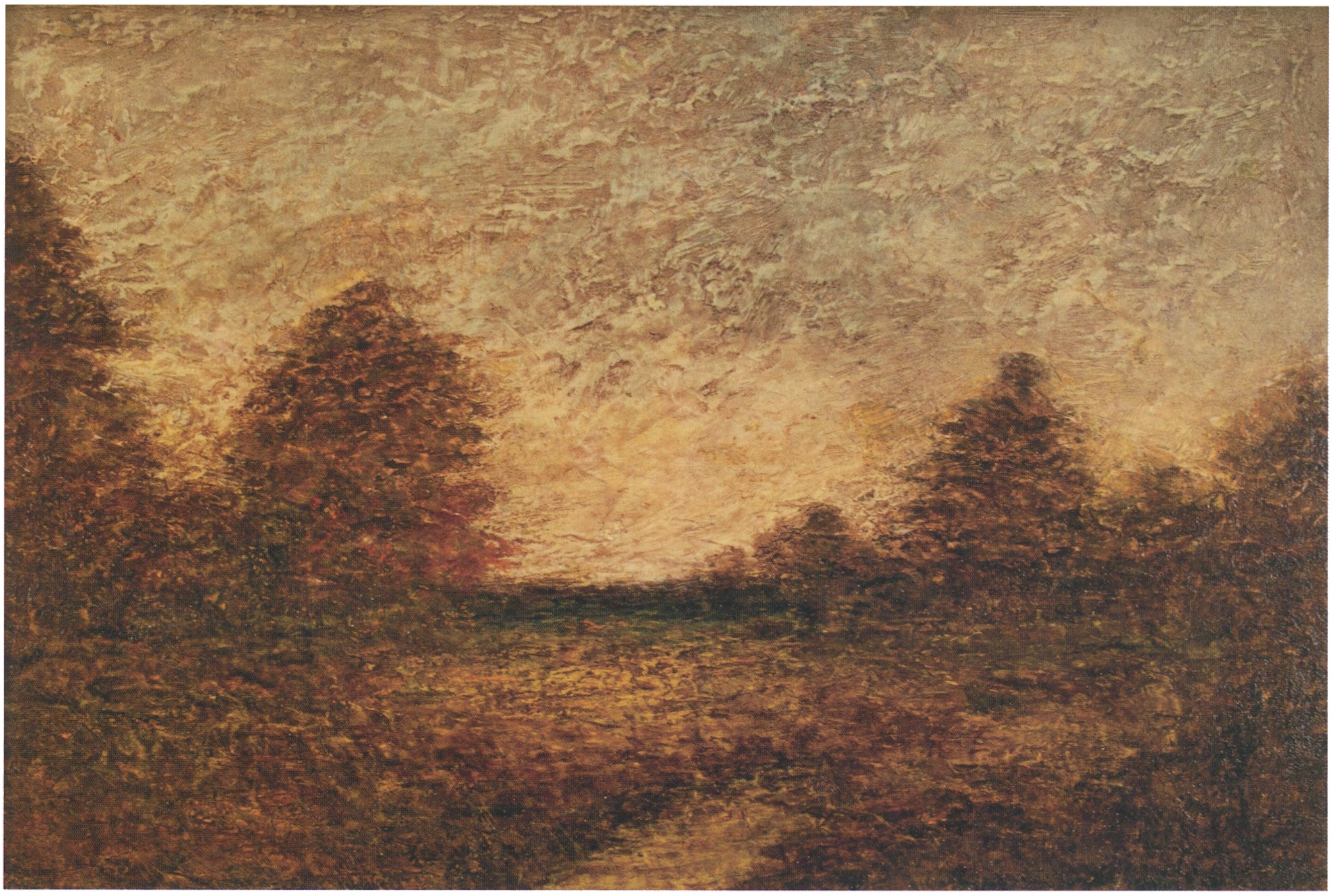


Fig. 4.59. Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Russet Fall*, c. 1895. Oil on panel, 8 x 12 in. Private collection.

side, sun-tanned, color of colors, color of the cow and the deer, silver-downy beneath, turned toward the late bleached and russet fields . . . Emblem of my winter condition."[129] The bookish Blakelock, like his contemporaries J. Francis Murphy, J. Frank Currier, and Dwight Tryon, to name only a few, may well have read Thoreau, if not Emerson.

It may be that bouts of incipient schizophrenia throughout the late 1880s and 1890s intensified and heightened Blakelock's sensory capacities, allowing him to tap reservoirs of supersensory apprehension. In *Russet Fall*, circa 1895 (fig. 4.59), the patterning of rubbed abrasions, detailed organic form, and glazed tone produce a shimmering near-hallucinogenic vision. Sensual data seduce the eye and mind. Vibrant silvery skies impinge on Blakelock's woods, invading the branches in scattered eyelets of rubbed-in color. Many of the artist's panels have the feel of a pictograph or rock outcropping shorn by time and circumstance. The intermeshing of tonal glazes varying from bluish green to gray sienna furnishes the work with both a glowing warmth and unity. Nothing was withheld to achieve surface brilliance. Blakelock was even known to run a faucet over his pigment to achieve a certain natural feel, or gouge his hardened paint with a meat skewer to suggest some immemorial process or erosion. A *New York Times* review of a Lotos Club exhibition in 1896 shows that Blakelock's "peculiar manner" was not lost on his contemporaries. "R. A. Blakelock has methods of his own in his evolution of a picture. Scraping, building up pigment, changing and glazing, when successful he secures a wonderful result, though there is always the suggesting of happy accident. Not that this militates against the canvas; on the contrary, a richness is thus at times obtained, probably impossible otherwise."[130] Even a relatively straightforward image like *Transcendental Landscape*, circa 1895 (fig. 4.60), has been created with a captivating freedom and expressive

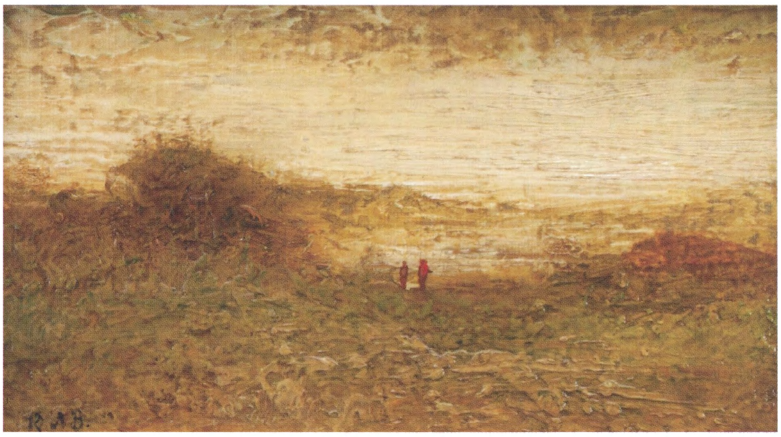


Fig. 4.60. Ralph Albert Blakelock, *Transcendental Landscape*, c. 1895. Oil on panel, 4 x 7½ in. Private collection.

verve, both the fissured and scraped surface of the support and the brushy, almost watercolor-like quality of the pigments combining to produce a feeling of ethereality at once timeless and momentary. The painted jottings of figures, fading in the twilit mists, only add to the sense of perceptual reciprocity—or oneness with nature, which deep subjective states, the kind to which Blakelock was clearly attuned, manifest to the mind. In such meditative or mystic raptures, the senses become fused as one: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste flowing into a singular experience, in which the mind experiences itself as part of a single continuum of perceiver and perceived. Chapter 7 will fully explore this quasi-religious understanding and near animistic feeling for nature that was popular in educated circles in the decades around the turn of the century.

In 1899, at the time when the Tonalist movement was approaching its early heights, Blakelock's battle with mental illness ended with the artist being committed to a hospital in Middletown, New York. The economic ups and downs of the depression of the 1890s had made it a rough decade for American artists, and although important collectors had bought works by Blakelock, he was not able to escape debt, enduring a humiliating struggle to sell his paintings at extremely low prices to keep his family afloat. The specter of abject poverty affected Blakelock's delicate constitution and hastened his collapse. His family was forced to move from lodging to lodging in humiliating circumstances. For the next twenty years until his death in 1919, Blakelock remained in mental institutions while the market for his paintings climbed and finally boomed. By 1902, articles, exhibitions, and critics' reflections had established Blakelock nearly on a par with Inness, Wyant, and Homer Dodge Martin, almost as if the artist, hidden away in that hospital in Middletown, New York, was a dead master. The myth of the mad genius began to echo in art circles. Already by 1900, Blakelock was included in the American Section of the Exposition Universelle in Paris, his landscapes singled out as uniquely representative examples of American art. In 1902 a rambling reminiscence in the pages of *Brush and Pencil* described Blakelock as a poet and Tonalist genius: " . . . the man was a born colorist . . . his moods are almost as many as those of nature. He saw with a curious temperament, or let us say, he dreamed rather of nature, and he put his visions down in color with as little form as it was possible to give and carry his tonal schemes . . . Of realism there is none . . . his trees are seldom botanically correct . . . and he secured tones and combinations of pigment that few have discovered . . . He piled on pigment and he scraped, he varnished and he repainted . . . The result was generally a low-keyed fantasy, recalling the tints and the mellowness of some old tapestry or rug. Again, he would get a brilliancy of sky over sea or earth that was little short of marvelous . . . It was feeling, pure and simple, like the improvisations of some gifted musician, who secures the harmonies and sweetness of his instrument unconsciously and intuitively."[131] The article neatly echoes what de Kay and the Gilder circle had been saying about Blakelock and Ryder and the American Tonalists for almost twenty years, underlining at the close, Blakelock's "sense of color and his ability to produce tonal effects . . . " as the artist's distinctive feature.[132]

A crescendo of belated appreciation reached its first peak in 1913, when one of the artist's moonlight scenes sold for $13,900, and subsequently in 1916, when the market for Blakelock's work reached even more dizzying levels. After his death, the demand for Blakelock softened and the understanding of his contribution to American art was distorted by the forgeries that flooded the galleries during the initial frenzy for his paintings, not to mention the reappearance of second-rate examples of his work that Blakelock himself had turned out during hard times. Deterioration of many of the paintings Blakelock made, especially those in which he used bitumen, has contributed to the perception of the unevenness of his oeuvre. The romantic myth of his madness—that of the visionary outsider—also took on undue emphasis, obscuring his integral part in the Tonalist movement and his significant innovations in style and technique. His moonlight imagery, and its association with dreams and the unconscious, can be found in the work of Tonalists like Dwight Tryon, Charles Warren Eaton, Birge Harrison, and Charles Melville Dewey, while his use of variegated impasto grounds to achieve tactile, activated surfaces was favored by many Tonalists, most prominently, J. Francis Murphy, especially in Murphy's work after 1900. It may be that, in time, Blakelock's smaller experimental work, often unsigned, will loom larger in his overall achievement—a judgment made by critic John Canaday, writing in the *New York Times* of a Blakelock retrospective in 1973, who noted that the small, even tiny paintings "are generally superior technically, esthetically and expressively to the run of his more ambitious work."[133]

J. Francis Murphy (1853–1921)

Of the core generation of Tonalists, J. Francis Murphy (fig. 4.61) was perhaps the most representative and least appreciated as a radical innovator. The genial Murphy—Murph, to his friends—more than any artist of the day, encapsulated Tonalism's delicate moods and infinite refinements of sentiment. Like Ryder and Blakelock, Murphy never studied in Europe and was largely self-taught, making his way up from impoverished beginnings to become one of the most admired and loved artists of his generation. For forty years his vigorous yet quiescent landscapes took center stage in the maturing Tonalist movement; he explored, experimented, and developed a range of distinct styles, along with numerous technical innovations, within the narrow scope of his chosen imagery. Seemingly conservative in style, especially his early Hudson River and

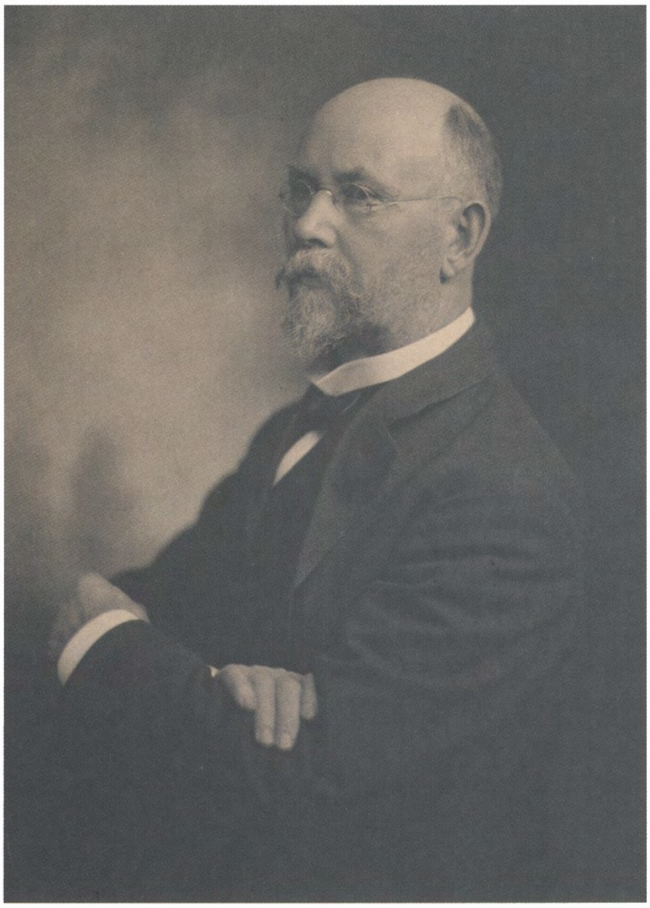


Fig. 4.61. Photo-illustration of J. Francis Murphy, c. 1920. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

post-Barbizon work in the 1880s, Murphy's simmering sunsets and autumn melancholy are deceptive; his best work embodies the radical experiments of his contemporaries tempered with a cool poise and exquisite indwelling depth of tone. He was a craftsman of the highest order and, unlike Ryder and Blakelock, his work has suffered no deterioration due to inept use of medium. Murphy was fundamentally a conceptualist by the late 1890s, building his paintings out of his grounds and surface manipulations; his imagery was layered on and distilled out of his prepared surfaces—images that have more to do with the essences of memory than particular places. The final period of Murphy's art, from 1900 to the painter's death in 1921, contains masterpieces of radical simplification and graphic symbolic resonance. These spare, haunting autumnal landscapes share a family resemblance with the work of fellow Tonalists but retain a stark, embedded Expressionist character that differentiates them from the work of the artist's American colleagues, and are unlike anything produced in Europe duringthe period. In Murphy's iconic late work, the manipulation of pigment foreshadows the Abstract Expressionism of the 1940s and 1950s.

Murphy's reputation suffered in the decades after his death, possibly as a result of the many small and repetitive signature pieces he turned out during the depression of the 1890s. Yet when these are culled, it is fair to say that Murphy stands as one of the greatest interpreters of the American landscape of all time. Perhaps no artist of his generation so thoroughly immersed himself in nature—Murphy often spent eight months of the year at his Catskill Mountains cabin—or so directly translated its infinite moods. Like the writings of his hero, Thoreau, Murphy's art breathes with felt life.

Born in Oswego, New York, the son of Irish immigrants and moving to Chicago as a young man, Murphy rose from dire poverty. He left his parents and his sisters in Chicago and moved to New York in 1875, and never returned. He had little formal education but was drawing and painting from an early age and exhibited paintings of a Hudson River School style at the National Academy of Design during his formative years before 1880. Murphy considered himself self-taught and, like Ryder, Blakelock, and other homegrown Tonalists, his lack of European training and his reliance on his natural skills and attachments to the American scene allowed him freedom to move and develop in ways that fully expressed his temperament, unburdened by academic ideals. His early draftsmanship, honed on the details of landscape, especially the small plants that adorn the foregrounds of his earliest paintings, was technically refined in a classic Hudson River manner. His move to New York proved decisive for his transition, where he came under the sway of the developing Tonalist School, especially the mature Inness and the admonitions for a broader painterly style found in William Morris Hunt's *Talks on Art.* A treasure trove of diaries, letters, newspaper clippings, and account books that Murphy and his wife kept, recording the highs and lows of a career in art, allows an unparalleled glimpse into the artist's life, and perhaps more important, offers an intimate view of the evolution of the Tonalist movement between 1880 and 1920 through one of its quintessential representatives.

The influence of Inness and the literary culture of the day is immediately apparent in the young Murphy's journal of 1878, in which he copied verbatim key sections of Inness's manifesto on art published that year in *Harper's Magazine,* passages in which Inness underlined the importance of unity and the expression of sentiment or emotion, such as, "Its [art's] real greatness consists in the quality and the force of this emotion." Murphy also copied down passages in which Inness warned against elaborate detail and overly finished work, "mercantile finish," to the exclusion of "inspiration which allures the mind to the regions of the unknown." From the Scottish painter Sir David Wilkie, Murphy copied "Poetry and music precede civilization, but painting is a consequence, and the perfection of every other art." From the naturalist (and friend of Murphy) John Burroughs, Murphy noted a quote from Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici*: "We carry with us the wonders we seek without us." From Ralph Waldo Emerson came, "What is true anywhere is true every where. And let him go where he will, he can only find so much beauty or worth as he carries." The artist also chose Thoreau's radical credo: "I have lived some thirty yeas on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable or valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors. . . . " It is remarkable that the twenty-five-year-old Murphy, with little formal education, had already absorbed from artistic and literary sources, old and new, the most profound Romantic Transcendental thinking on the subjective sources of art inspiration—a tradition that underscores the deeply expressive and personal act of creation at the heart of the Tonalist movement—as well as Thoreau's concept of life as an experiment. Murphy's bookish passion for literature and philosophy was shared by many of the artist's colleagues, a reminder that in his day reading was not just a pastime but also an essential source of profound ruminations on existential issues—and, for many, a substitute for formal religion. Much of the spiritual life of the country revolved around the reading experience. As will be seen in chapter 7, no two authors played a larger role in the development of the Tonalist movement, and the appreciation of landscape art, than Thoreau and Emerson—a taste abetted and reinforced by poets, philosophers, and even the scientist Charles Darwin.

Murphy began showing at the National Academy of Design in 1876 and by 1880 was averaging four acceptances a year. In 1880 a long review noted that the artist is "accused of 'Corotism'—no sin, by the way, if the following of the same path does not lead to direct imitation." Corot had been singled out by Inness in his 1878 manifesto for his "inspirational power," and Murphy, who had been nicknamed in the press "The American Corot," probably took delight in the comparison and the spirited defense that he was no imitator (for an American artist at this time, the charge of imitating European styles could be a career-spoiler, as has been noted in the case of the figurative artist Will Low). The 1880 review takes pains to point out Murphy's Tonalist proclivities for "cool vapors of the morning, the hot haze of midday and the warm mists of twilight—that is not imitation per se."[134] Such a spirited defense of Corot by progressive critics, especially in Boston, proved to be a critical beachhead for the Tonalist movement.

By the early 1880s, Murphy was already famous in artistic circles, and a young illustrator on the rise like Joseph Pennell regarded the celebrated artist with awe.[135] An unidentified newspaper clipping from 1881 describes in loving detail the workaday life of the "foremost disciple of Corot," ensconced in his humble unadorned studio in the Vienna Bakery Building on Broadway, filled with the fumes of the finest coffee in New York. "He has a sincere admiration for Thoreau, and, like that singularly original genius, finds in nature a thousand vivid embodiments of mental impressions. It is the characteristic of the objective school, to which Mr. Murphy belongs that it subdues nature to its own thought, or sees it through such media as gives a strong individual coloring to every emanation from its brush, realizing in truth the Emersonian maxim that art is nature passed through the alembic of man." Here, explicitly grounded in American Transcendental literary culture, were precisely the qualities—originality, individuality, non-imitative and subjective inspiration—that de Kay and the Gilder circle demanded of a national art. In 1881, Murphy had his first painting accepted into the Society of American Artists' annual exhibition, with many more to follow in the next quarter century (Murphy became a member of the society in 1889 and won the first Webb Prize in 1887). Again in 1881, Murphy was the subject of a long article in *The Art Interchange*, which described the artist as in "great sympathy with the Society of American Artists," and "'chums'" with George Fuller and Albert Pinkham Ryder; Thoreau was mentioned as his favorite author and John Burroughs his intimate friend. The article quoted the uncomplaining and optimistic Murphy, "For my part, I think if an artist who really loves his profession and paints from a motive, not merely to make money, he cannot fail to be successful in time. The trouble is, we expect too much—want to begin where our father's left off." Murphy's enduring faith in the heartfelt motive was recorded by the artist's early biographer, Eliot Clark, when in later years, a Boston painter disparaged Ryder as a very poor painter. Murphy replied, "Yes, a very poor painter, but a great artist."[136]

By 1881 the twenty-eight-year-old artist had room for optimism. In these hard years for young and emerging American artists (especially those figurative artists returning from Europe), when Murphy had been supporting himself with illustration work and occasional teaching, the artist sold eight landscape paintings at Boston's Doll & Richards gallery for $690. That year he had two sales at the National Academy of Design, and one more at the Boston Art Club, so that in the first five months of 1881 he banked a total of $2,119.50, surely an indication that there was a growing market for small intimate landscapes in the Tonalist mold.

Boston clearly provided a flourishing market for Murphy as it had for Inness, La Farge, and many other Tonalists. In 1882, Murphy showed forty-three paintings with New York colleague Charles Melville Dewey at Doll & Richards, selling ten for an after-expenses profit of $470, a third of the artist's income for 1882. A sense of the Boston affinity for Murphy, Charles Melville Dewey, and the Tonalist school—long nurtured by William Morris Hunt—was captured in a review of the exhibition, praising Murphy, who "possesses a poetic mind, is rich in the knowledge of nature, and all his life has held 'communion with her visible forms.' . . . In his selection of subjects he evinces a marked love for the quiet scenes . . . the tender summer sky, a shadowy tree bower, the rich, green fields, or some quaint and rustic country home. These he paints and feels, these show his love for the gentle life, he leaves the tragedies as things not needed, for they come frequently

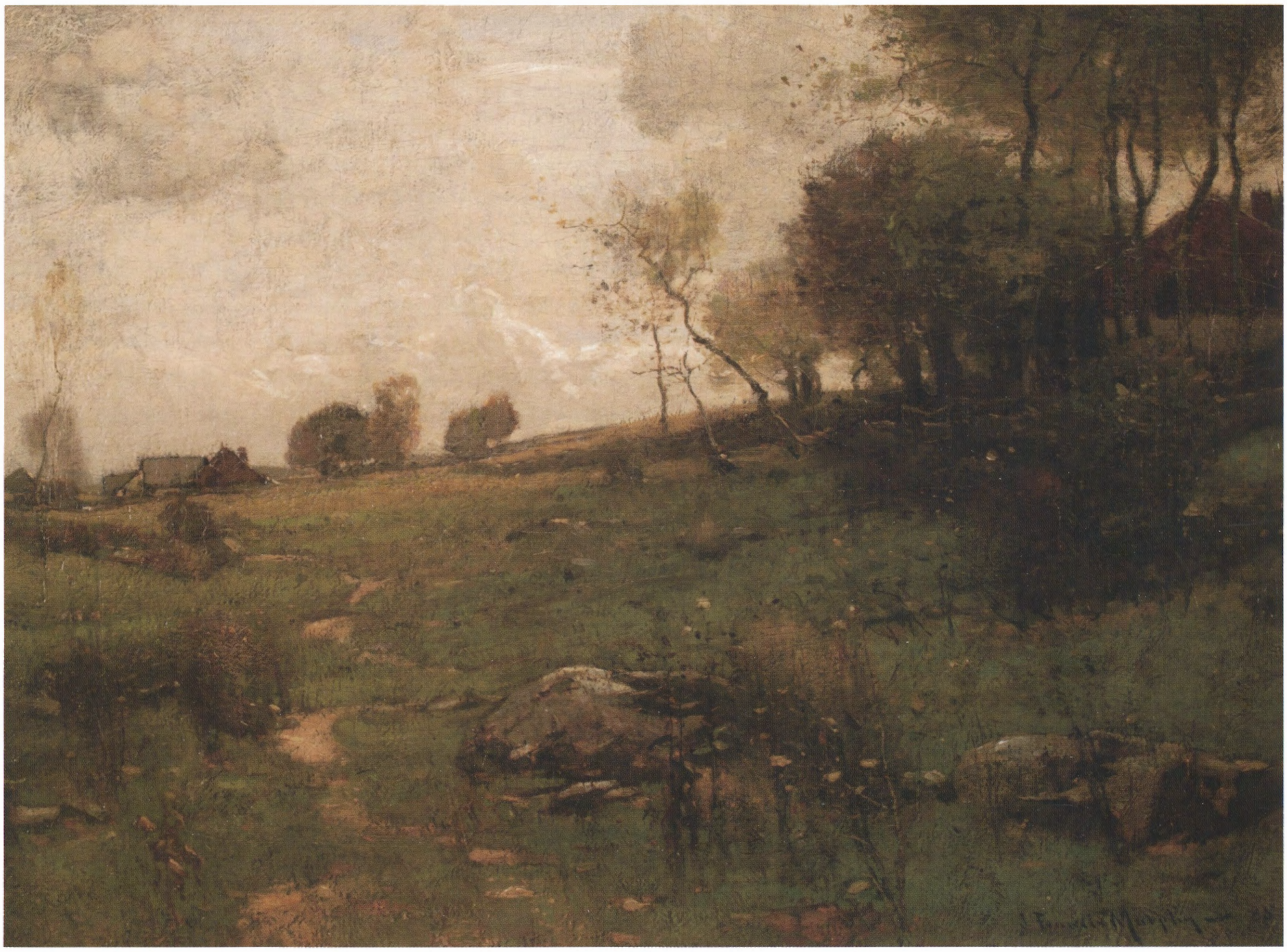


Fig. 4.62. J. Francis Murphy, *Hillside Farm*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 14 x 19 in. Private collection.

enough without calling. He gives us joy inwardly ... " The reviewer's paraphrase of William Cullen Bryant, an advocate of American literary nationalism ("To him who in the love of Nature hold Communion with her visible forms, she speaks a various language ... "), and praise for an art of inward joys, demonstrates the incipient fusion of Transcendentalist literary culture with the visual repertoire of Tonalists like Murphy. It is hardly surprising that when Murphy appeared at his opening at Doll & Richards in 1882, he took the opportunity to go to Concord and attend the funeral of Emerson and visit the grave and house site of Thoreau at Walden Pond. He would repeat this pilgrimage years later, when he returned to Concord and gathered white pine seedlings to be transplanted to his country house in the Catskills.

By the early 1880s, Murphy's middle-period style was well established, featuring motifs and orientation derived from Inness's notion of the "civilized landscape." Much of Murphy's imagery originated in 1877, when the artist spent a year working and sketching on a rural New Jersey farm as a guest of the Chicago family of A.S. Roorbach. Over the year he spent helping out on the farm, he made numerous sketches of buildings, stone walls, wooden fences, trees, and plants. These drawings became a kind of memory bank of motifs on which he drew, and which appeared in his paintings from around 1878, when he abandoned his early Hudson River style and embarked on his first mature period as a Tonalist.[137] Relying on the detailed sketches he made on Roorbach's farm, these landscapes are synthetic constructs, carefully orchestrated arrangements of landscape ornamentation. In *Hillside Farm*, 1885 (fig. 4.62), Murphy has taken the material of the sketches, the foreground plants, rocks, and meandering grassy path, and composed them in a fairly traditional manner to create a notion of place, though in Murphy's case the compositional arrangement is akin to a stage setting with props rearranged at will, a formal process allowing nearly infinite variations. The rural farmyard imagery, familiar and pleasing for contemporary purchasers of art, was a way for Murphy to indulge a synthetic approach, stressing feeling over objective reality by way of balancing forms, masses, and details—and unifying the various elements within an envelope of carefully modulated tones. Murphy had been quick to state his artistic point of view in 1881 to a purchaser of one of his landscapes, claiming that it represented no particular place. "It is a 'composition' only, as are all my pictures."[138] By 1885, when Murphy won the Second

Hallgarten Prize at the National Academy for his landscape *Tints of a Vanished Past* (1884, Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville), the synthetic, or composed, landscape painted from memory was well established among the second-generation Tonalists. As his biographer, Eliot Cark, noted of that year, "we observe the definite influence of the tonal school,"[139] based on French Barbizon sources and Wyant. Inness was painting more and more in the studio. Inness's 1884 retrospective would have demonstrated the point decisively to Murphy and his contemporaries: actual places were no longer the point—the sense of place and the evocations of individual feeling were the hallmark of the modern landscape. The result, as has been seen, was that from 1886 on the Society of American Artists' annual exhibitions were filling with Tonalist landscapes of a decidedly poetic bent.

The key to Murphy's success as a tonal stylist was the imposition of his subjective emotion on the arrangement of landscape forms. The low perspective and high horizon in *Hillside Farm*, 1885, dramatizes all the foreground elements, elevating the composition from the simply picturesque or merely charming, which his work in illustration might have encouraged. Here the intuitive sense, the personal mood of the artist, is expressed by the way in which the telling details are orchestrated and imbued with life within a limited range of tonality. It is akin to what Bernard Berenson called "ideated sensations," which evoke for the viewer a tactile feeling for place, or what he described as "space composition": "It is the art which humanizes the void, making it an enclosed Eden, a domed mansion wherein our higher selves can find an abode."[140] Murphy's composition breathes of its own sultry atmosphere—Inness's unifying element—and so pulses with inner life. The kernel of Murphy's expressive style is simplicity, and as with dozens of Murphy's finest Tonalist colleagues, the style becomes more and more simplified as Murphy's work matures. The exquisitely rendered details in the artist's foregrounds of the early 1880s (the lovingly rendered weeds that filled his early drawings) would gradually disperse in the work of the later 1890s, to be replaced by stylized paint marks, and then to evolve into even more dramatic and expressive readings of overall mass and form and enveloping atmosphere in the last decades of Murphy's career.

The dramatized meadow foreground with its display of common field perennials—milkweed, Queen Anne's Lace, goldenrod, thistle, and common mullein—highlighted like grace notes against the broader tonal masses was a shared signature mark of Tonalist painters in the 1880s and an important characteristic of Aesthetic Tonalism (the Aesthetic movement is replete with the decorative patterning of flattened floral forms), the specificity of floral detail thinning out in the 1890s, to be followed by more generalized brushstrokes, a kind of choreographed symbology familiar to American eyes steeped in the look of overgrown pastures ubiquitous in rural America. The motif is found in the work of Inness, Wyant, Charles Warren Eaton, Charles Harry Eaton, and scores of Tonalists, apparently echoing Emerson's thought: "To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour a picture which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again . . . The succession of native plants in the pastures and roadsides, which makes the silent clock by which time tells the summer hours, will make even the division of the day sensible to a keen observer."[141] For members of the postwar generation, the image of an overgrown field, and the flowers that marked the cycle of the seasons, was not just a pleasant reminder of summer escapes or childhood nostalgia, but stirred feelings of loss and abandonment, of Civil War soldiers who had failed to return, of farms given up—soon to be overrun by encroaching second-growth forests—of families moved west or to the cities and mill towns, of a lost agricultural world disappearing before their eyes.

Sunset Hillside, 1882 (fig. 4.63), is an early example of the depths of brooding melancholy Murphy could embody in his art—which only deepened as the years went by, a quality one associates with Ryder's nocturnes or the tumultuous stormy skies of Inness. It is indicative of the deep emotional currents of melancholy or grief or pensive longing that weighed on the postwar generation of the 1880s that such a forbidding work as *Sunset Hillside* would hold commercial appeal. Death still stalked late Victorian America in ways that we rarely imagine. Even a well-off and successful couple like George and Helena de Kay Gilder suffered unspeakable tragedies resulting from childhood diseases that are today almost unknown (the Gilders lost their first-born daughter, Marion, in 1876, and another child, Richard, at birth in 1880, losses that would sadden this high-profile Victorian couple for the remainder of their lives).[142]

Somber autumnal renderings like *Sunset Hillside* retained a hold on the buying public for almost two generations. The multiple glazings of the shadowed hillside produce a depth of fuliginous tone out of which ranks of brittle autumn-shorn plants emerge like phantoms. There is a strange choreographic serenity produced by these repeating notes of organic forms; skeletal reminders of summer's passing. The silhouetted tree on the crest of the hill and the flaming embers of a fall sunset add a jolt of graphic drama. In 1882, before Ryder and Blakelock had established their powerful nocturnal imagery, only Inness and Martin had created works of similarly compacted emotional charge. Murphy's underlying subjectivity and dramatic depictions of emotion laid bare remained a constant undercurrent in his work, springing forth in new and surprising guises throughout his career.

In 1884, the year of the great controversy over William Merritt Chase's domination of the Society of American Artists, Murphy was singled out in the *Art Year Book* for the all-American

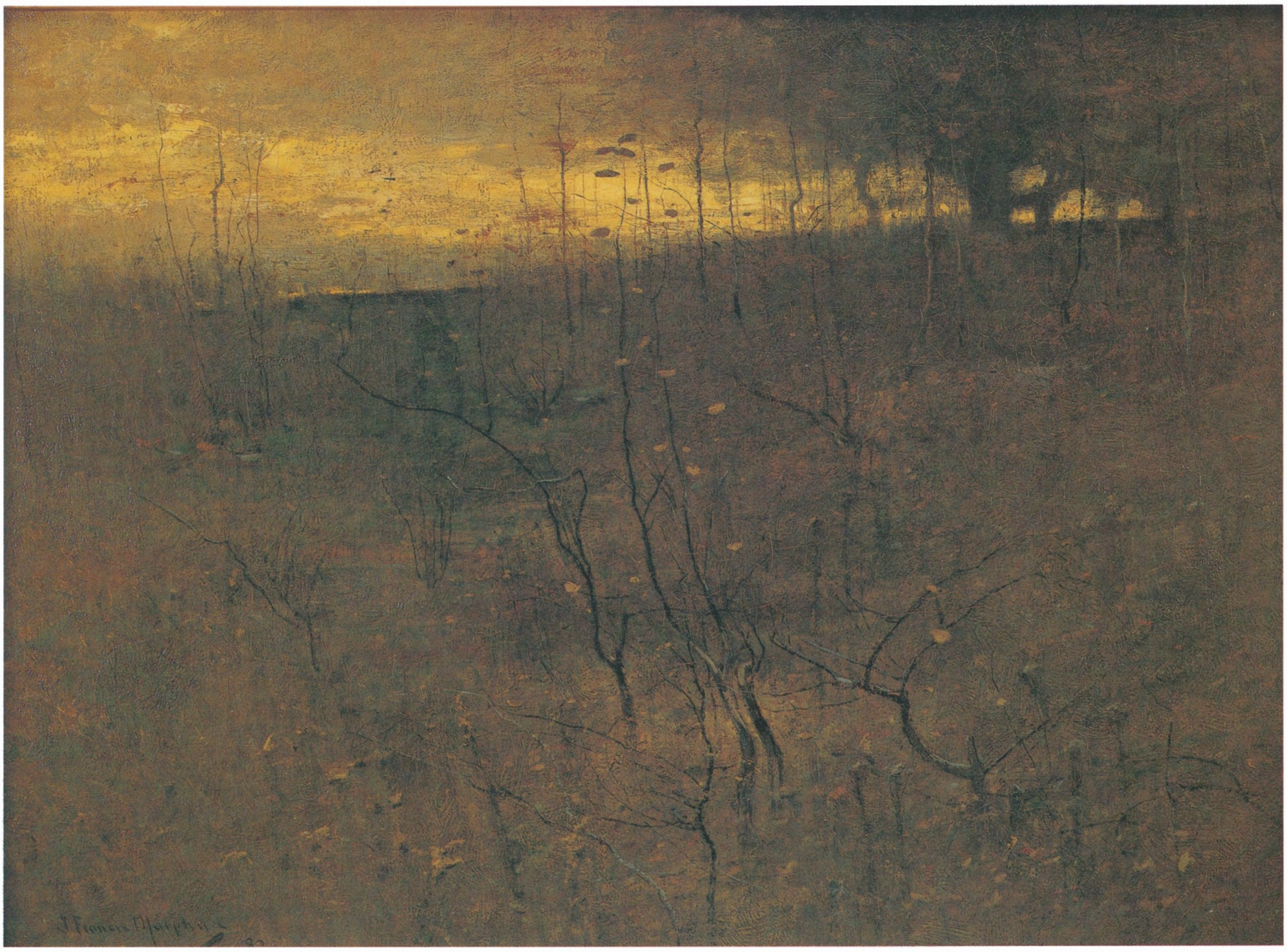


Fig. 4.63. J. Francis Murphy, *Sunset Hillside*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

quality of his work, "not only pictures, but poems and modern poems . . . His subjects, his education and development, his feeling and sentiment, are all purely American. Few landscape painters unite so much personal style, so much individuality of expression, with so keen an insight into the subtler phases of nature, and so truthful a rendering of her most airy and evanescent moods."[143] As evidenced here, by mid-decade the fundamental tropes of the Tonalist movement were firmly established in the public mind: the literary mirroring, the poetic conceits, the subjective Transcendentalist stance, the bedrock American ideal. In 1885, during the hiatus of society exhibitions, Murphy not only won the Second Hallgarten Prize but was also made an Associate at the National Academy of Design, another indication that the warhorses of the Hudson River School had faded even from the walls of the Academy. As Eliot Clark wrote in 1926, one of Murphy's key strengths was the artist's ability to move on from success and take on new challenges. "Murphy grew from his best efforts. He knew when he had carried an idea to its uttermost conclusion and he never repeated the composition of his inspired themes although he so frequently repeated the 'characteristic example.'"[144] For the year 1885, Murphy's income from his art totaled more than $3,400, another indication that the Tonalist landscape artists were making significant inroads in the art market and staking out a niche of their own.

Murphy married Adah Clifford Smith, an artist in her own right, in 1883; in 1886 the couple took their one and only trip to Europe, where the Murphys visited museums, and Murphy painted. Presumably, Corot and Constable would have been high on his list of artists to view, along with the old masters. The few paintings he produced in France on his European sojourn display a broadening of his approach to form and mass, the eliding of extraneous detail, and a more rhythmic quality in his brushstroke. In 1887 the Murphys were well off enough to buy land and build a small summer cottage—"Weedwild," a name that evokes Murphy's early and enduring love of depicting wildflowers and grasses—in Arkville, in the Catskill Mountains of New York State, which would remain Murphy's primary artistic stomping grounds for the next thirty or more years. Murphy began spending from seven to eight months of the year in the Catskills before returning to his studio apartment at the Chelsea Hotel in New York City in the cold months where his canvases were stretched and painting was completed. Murphy's seasonal migration to the countryside in the spring and back to the city in the fall mirrors the modus operandi for almost every major Tonalist artist, although for the reticent and introverted Murphy, it was less a retreat than a return to the creative font of his artistic inspiration, where, summer and fall, he breathed in the essences of the natural world, rarely bothering with studies. In his Catskills hermitage, Murphy simply absorbed impressions and took a few notes—sometimes just jottings on the back of an envelope—storing up visual data and sensations to be composed onto canvas during the winter months in the city. The Murphy homestead, open to the sky and weather and the raw, clear-cut Catskills hillsides, defined his imagery for the rest of his career. Murphy's intimate landscapes broadened to include fallow meadows, clumps of barren trees holding the last of their sere foliage, all encompassed by crystalline atmosphere—a far cry from the cozy New Jersey lowlands of his early inspiration. The summer remove to the Catskills also saw the growing influence of Murphy's Arkville neighbor, Alexander Wyant. The dispersed, hazy Catskills landscapes typical of Wyant, his small clearings arraying outward to a distant horizon, and his signature motif of a small pond or body of water to bring a cool note of reflected light from the sky into the foreground, make their first appearance in Murphy's landscapes at this time. Eliot Clark, a younger contemporary of Murphy and a fine painter in his own right, offered an insightful summary of Murphy's working methods in the 1890s:

"The point of view is more intimate, the form is treated for significant mass and picturesque contour, the foreground is not overburdened with irrelevant detail, the composition is arranged for organized relation of form rather than purely descriptive landscape. The light is heightened at the point of focal concentration and the chiaroscuro is consciously gradated to bring together the principal masses and create a unity of effect. The sky forms a functional relation to the dominant masses in the picture. The evening hour is the favorite motive of this period, the golden light making a veiled background against which tree forms are arranged with telling silhouette ... Thus we note the introduction of pigment textures to simplify and suggest form and to render the fundamental elements rather than surface ornamentation, to give the solidity and heaviness of earth, the moving and ephemeral quality of sky, the soft fullness of foliage, or the delicate veil of sere woods. The palette knife takes the place of the brush and the under painting is carefully prepared before the final painting is attempted. Over this surface thin glazes of transparent color give depth and richness to the darker hues and the half tones are rendered with a semi-opaque scumble. Thus the Murphy method evolves gradually from the thinly painted surface to heavy impasto, from the carefully rendered subject to the suggested and improvised form."[145]

Murphy's middle-period landscapes are mostly sunsets and twilights, rich in sumptuous greens and occasionally moody and dark with what Clark described as "indwelling though suppressed radiance, and the sense of infinite expanse."[146] The success of this style was established in Murphy's annus mirabilis of 1887, when he won the first Webb Prize of $300 at the Society of American Artists (a membership for Murphy was withheld until 1889). Both the institution of the Webb Prize for landscape by the society and its recognition of Murphy, an indigenous landscape painter who lacked the European credentials that had so marked the early ranks of the society, is indicative of the sea change in American art that was occurring around this time. The imagery and American sympathies of the likes of Inness, Murphy, Wyant, Martin, Charles Warren Eaton, and other homegrown painters were rubbing off on the returned expatriates: even Chase and Weir were painting small intimate landscapes. More important, the Tonalists were clearly beginning to have an impact on the marketplace and critics like de Kay were forming ranks behind them. Some of this ameliorating tension between the two sensibilities can be detected in a review of Murphy's prizewinning effort of 1887 in *The Art Interchange*; the writer praising the jury (three years after the disastrous 1884 exhibition) for "a certain liberal-mindedness that is commendable, Mr. Murphy's talent not running at all into that gray, intellectual method of painting which, for want of better words, may be roughly described as the favorite manner of the Society ... " The review went on to note the all-American "charm of color and freshness and decorative feeling ... " in Murphy's *Brook and Fields*.[147] By 1890 the stream of work by American- and foreign-trained landscape artists had so intermingled in terms of subject, style, and technique that the casual observer would have had a difficult time distinguishing the various lines of pedigree of the best Tonalists.

Another watershed for Murphy was joining the Macbeth Gallery in 1892, along with a cross section of the finest Tonalist artists of his generation. William Macbeth would become the primary dealer for the best American Tonalists in the coming decades, handling both the first-generation titans—Inness, Wyant, and Martin—and the rising stars like Murphy, Eaton, and Leonard Ochtman, and eventually the great transitional Tonalists born after 1865 like Arthur B. Davies and Robert Henri. Murphy's first painting exhibited by Macbeth, the small (eight-by-twelve-inch) *By the River* (date and location unknown) sold for $50. Murphy consigned twenty paintings to Macbeth that year and six were sold. The year 1893 saw another Murphy triumph at the American Watercolor Society; the artist had six works hung, six sales, and he won the coveted Evans Prize for best watercolor—$500—which William Evans, a voracious collector of Murphy, bought for his own growing collection for an additional $175. As will be seen in chapter 5, the Tonalist watercolor came into its own in the late 1880s and 1890s, sparking a renaissance for American

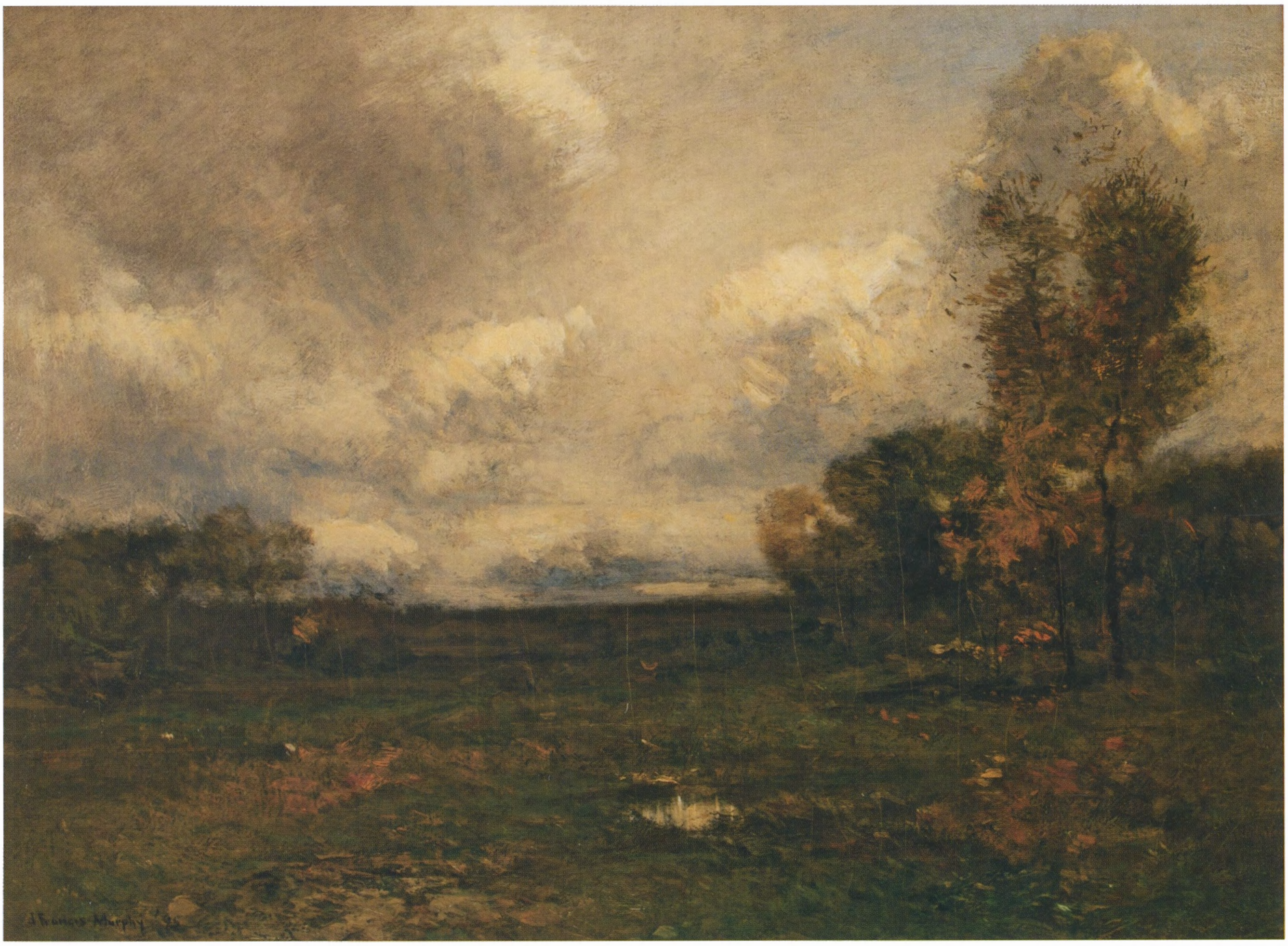


Fig. 4.64. J. Francis Murphy, *September Afternoon*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 14 x 19 in. Private collection.

watercolors, pastels, and etchings—lower-priced artworks, which proved an economic necessity in the sour art market during the deep economic depression of 1893–97. Murphy was one of the greatest practitioners of the form and in many critics' eyes watercolor proved to be the medium best suited for the development of a truly national school, energizing the creative strategies of American artists and allowing them to outshine their European competitors. The [New York] *Daily Tribune*'s review of Murphy's Evan's Prize–winning watercolor, *Under Gray Skies* (date and location unknown), alluded to this growing respect for the American style of watercolor. "Mr. Murphy puts unaffected feeing into his work, he is a meditative, intuitive artist . . . It is a lovely picture, not large and not very ambitious or striking as a composition, but fine in quality, and an illustration of one of the most original styles of which the American school can boast."[148] Watercolors helped Murphy weather the tough times to come until he gave up on the medium after 1898 when he decided "that messy work" was no longer worth the trouble.

During the Great Depression, Murphy's sales and income dropped precipitously. For years he struggled to make ends meet, cutting his prices and accepting a loan from collector William T. Evans. It was in these years that Murphy produced many small charming landscapes of conventional type. Often these were framed in overly ornate frames and housed in shadow boxes, which graced the overburdened Victorian parlors of the period. These tiny landscapes, approximately five by seven inches, have a rather repetitive sameness about them, not surprising considering the purely commercial motivation for their production, and have served as a distraction from the artist's masterpieces of the period. Sold for about ten dollars apiece, the small paintings allowed Murphy to barely scrape by when many of his fellow artists like Homer Dodge Martin were nearly destitute and others were dependent on teaching and portraiture. Blakelock, too, had been reduced to churning out cookie-cutter works for twenty-five dollars each until he saturated even this low-end market. That Murphy did maintain his artistic integrity in hard times is all the more surprising, again demonstrating how the Tonalist landscape provided the underpinning of a slowly developing market for American landscapes, which galleries like Macbeth Gallery would begin exploiting fully after 1900.

September Afternoon, 1895 (fig. 4.64), is an inspired example of Murphy's late middle period—at the height of the economic

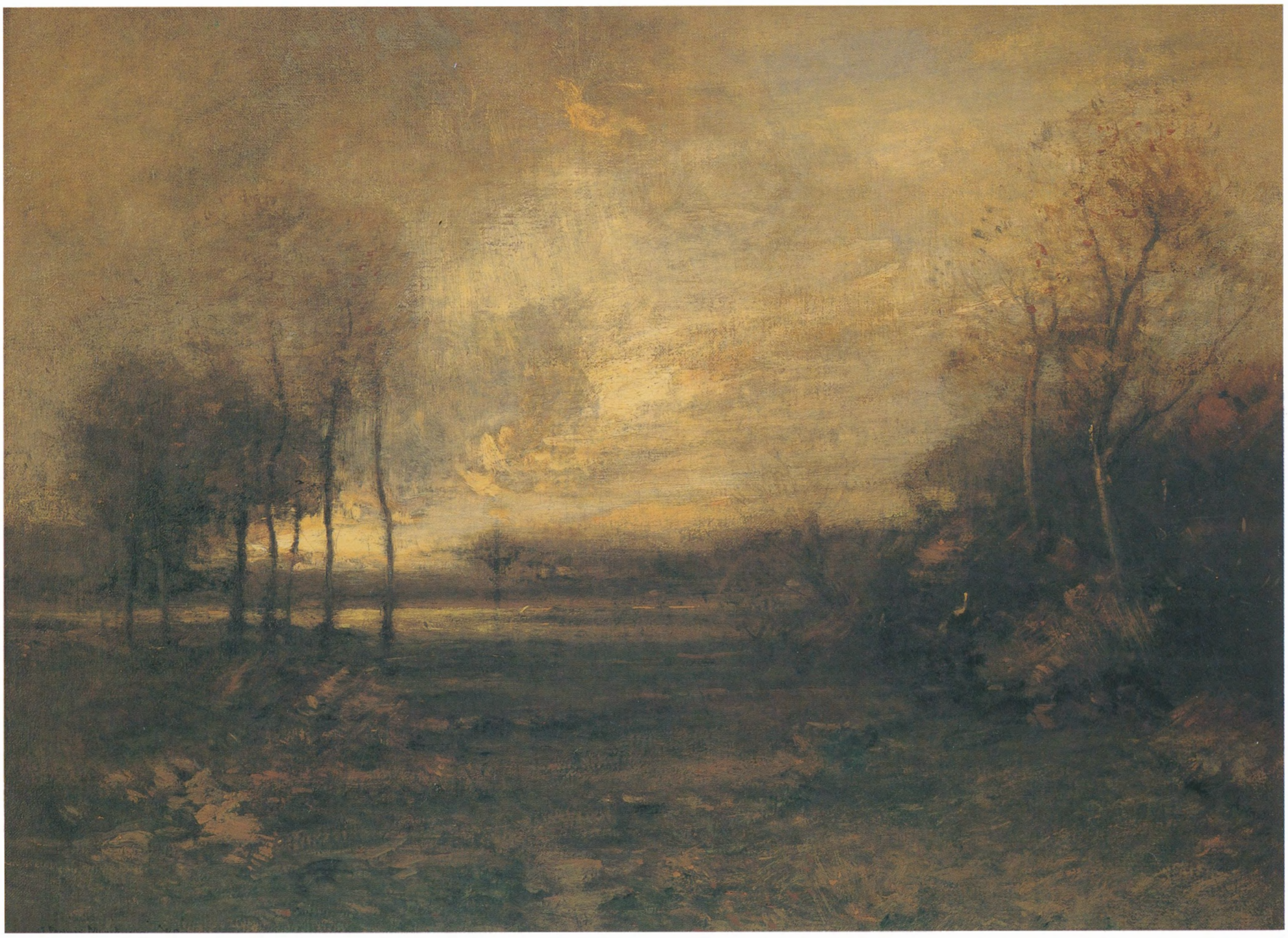


Fig. 4.65. J. Francis Murphy, *Indian Summer*, 1895. Oil on canvas, 14 x 19 in. Private collection.

downturn—which at first glance appears to be a perfectly charming if conventional "Barbizon" landscape with an admixture of Constable in the soaring clouds, perhaps putting it more in the English pastoral tradition than the French. Its conventionality is deceiving. The dramatic raised horizons of Murphy's early period have been lowered to allow more expansive skies and a largeness of vision, which the experience of the artist's summers in the Catskills surely engendered. The exquisite balance of suggestive detail and generalized forms gives interest to what at first might seem quite ordinary. It is this play of microcosm and macrocosm, of sharp color forms and hazy patterns, that provide much visual delight over repeated viewing. The cluttered foregrounds of his New Jersey pastorals—the detailed plant forms—are replaced by nuances of suggestive paint handling that can be enjoyed in and for themselves, a pure projection of the artist's love of his craft. A flutter of orange daubs in the trees suggests a breeze. The clouds are textured with creamy impasto to mimic their form and aerial softness. Throughout, graduated sequences of tones harmonize the overall composition, while careful glazing produces a captivating patina: the darker greens fairly throb with refracted tones. The feeling for solitude and restfulness, central to the Tonalist aesthetic, is combined with a whispering sense of movement in the landscape, a metamorphic flow of energy that has much to do with a bookish age obsessed with Darwin and the organic interaction of all living things. Given the conservatism and fraught economic climate of the times, Murphy has managed to infuse an otherwise standard-issue bucolic image with scintillating life.

Another 1895 work, *Indian Summer,* 1895 (fig. 4.65), exhibited at the Society of American Artists in 1898, shows Murphy's underlying and enduring affinities for autumnal melancholy. A brooding, dark-toned painting of repressed radiance, Indian Summer seems to reflect the difficult times and perfectly suits Murphy's evolving penchant for a minimalist rendition of mass and form, shorn of the unnecessary. The painting is a miracle of sumptuous glazing and orchestrated focal points, which directs the eye to the essentials, achieving an overall carrying power far greater than otherwise would be possible in a scene overstuffed with extraneous detail. The deep glazing of the foreground masses is a perfect foil for the throbbing sunset sky. Wraith-like trees hover in the dusk. Bits of fading leafage float in the smoky glazes like trapped spirits in amber. The areas of focal concentration emerge and fade, all balanced against the broader haze of twilight. Poise, balance, silence, and a ravishing pictorial elegance make this a haunting icon of depression-ridden America before the dawn of better times at the turn of the century. Unlike Inness, who continued to people his landscapes to the end of his life, Murphy, like his patron saint Thoreau, preferred images of solitude, and the concentration of spiritual resources brought about by a solitary existence close to the earth. The absence of figures, as was the case with the vast majority of Tonalist landscapes, allows the viewer to inhabit, visually and emotionally, the enclosing confines of the scene depicted, each to make the place his or her own.

Responding to the difficult selling climate of the late 1890s, a group of twelve landscape painters from the Society of American artists, including Murphy, decided to form a group called the Society of Landscape Painters, with an annual exhibition of their own dedicated to Tonalist landscapes (see chap. 6 for further discussion). The artists had no particular bone to pick either with the National Academy of Design or the Society of American Artists, but presumably felt that an exhibition dedicated to the Tonalist landscape might put their achievements in a more propitious light—differentiating themselves from both the figurative and Impressionist painters in the Society of American Artists—and lead to better sales. In the first exhibition of 1898, Murphy exhibited ten works and sold seven for a total of $980.86—all "sacrificed" for lower prices than noted in the catalogue, but they nevertheless were sales that indicated a successful packaging and publicity formula for these Tonalist painters, and perhaps at last a rising market for American art. By 1900, the 1893–97 depression had receded into memory; William T. Evans, the major collector of Tonalist landscapes, sold a large portion of his collection at auction in 1900, among them seven Murphys, which brought a total of $3,215, or about three times what Evans had paid for them. With the Evans sale (and the Thomas B. Clarke sale of American painting the year before in 1899) the American market in Tonalist landscapes began a precipitous rise, outselling Impressionism and figurative and genre works, a trend that would continue well into the 1920s.

After 1900, the climate for American landscape art changed dramatically; dealers began to take on the paintings of Tonalists in increasing numbers, and the traditional outlets, the annual exhibitions of the National Academy of Design, the Society of American Artists, and other venues (the Boston Art Club, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the Art Institute of Chicago being the most prominent) began to have less and less importance for artists' pocketbooks. By 1901, Murphy was turning over most of his production to dealers: Macbeth was his primary dealer, but dealers Kurtz, Hurley, Craig, and Evans in Philadelphia figure in his account books (Milch Gallery would eventually become his primary dealer in the decade before his death). Murphy's reputation grew by leaps and bounds and soon he had a waiting list for his paintings and dealers clamoring for examples. In 1901, Murphy was again elected to membership in the Society of American Artists (he had dropped his membership, probably during the depression) after a painting he submitted received rave reviews by the selection jury; none other than the society's president, John La Farge, urged him to rejoin. Murphy was doing so well that he refused the collector William Evans a bargain price for his landscape exhibited at the Society of American Artists, holding out for the full price of $750, which he ultimately received. Murphy's bargaining days were over. At the Society of American Landscape Painters exhibition in 1901, Murphy sold seven of nine works for $1,854, about equal to his entire earnings from sales for the year 1898. In 1902, Murphy's *October Fog* won the Carnegie prize at the society's exhibition for the most meritorious painting. By 1903, Murphy could hardly be bothered to exhibit paintings anymore since dealers Clausen, Cochran, Hurley, and Macbeth were buying his complete production. In 1909, Murphy began drifting away from Macbeth over a squabble concerning a Macbeth client to whom Murphy had sold a picture, undercutting Macbeth on price and shutting the dealer out of any commission. By 1910 and 1911 the dealers were competing for Murphy paintings at auction and directly from the artist; Murphy's small canvases were selling for $400 and $500 each. With the Knoedler and Katz galleries offering Murphy a standing order to buy paintings outright, Murphy informed Macbeth that he would sell through other dealers and set the price as he saw fit: "It is a fine thing to feel free with your work . . . I am now independent. . . . " In 1912, Murphy made $13,537 in the first six months of the year; by 1913 his income would rise to over $19,000.

By the early years of the new century, Murphy found himself at the epicenter of the Tonalist movement. After the death of the founding generation of Inness, Wyant, Martin, and Whistler, Murphy was certainly the most successful of the living practitioners, with the possible exception of Albert Pinkham Ryder, Dwight Tryon, Henry Ward Ranger, and Charles Harold Davis, all of whom garnered high prices at auction and commanded legions of eager collectors. Tonalism had become the mood of the age. After the influx of Impressionism in the early 1890s, Tonalism dominated the market by 1900, thoroughly permeating the consciousness of painters, dealers, and patrons alike. Even the word *tone* found it way into common parlance—as it does to this day. Murphy, in a letter to his wife in September 1900, describes the scenery in terms of tone: "The country is beginning to look fine, quite yellowish in tone." In another letter of 1902, Murphy notes the important role of the gilded frame in the overall tonal feel of a painting: "I put it in my frame and it comes out fine. It is one of the best ones I have done. The frame helps so much in giving it tone." And in 1912, admiring one of his own early paintings, Murphy writes: "I wish I had it, you would like it, such a fine old tone." A writer, R.G. McIntyre, in an article in *The Miscellany* in the spring of 1912, described Murphy's work in terms that formed the keystone of his late reputation: simplicity, economy, brevity, suggestiveness, and charm. "His canvases are never crowded, and there is a total absence of laborious detail, as there is of broad splotches of paint. His forms are suggested, our imagination being called upon to draw them out, and his color is laid on in soft tones merging gracefully into each other." (*The Three Trees*, c. 1910, fig. 4.66) The writer went on to note the care and lack of hurry in Murphy's work habits; the artist only painted what moved him and when he was moved. Most important, the writer considered Murphy as American, through and through. "His work, too, is truly American in character; there is no reminiscence of the art of other countries or other ages, but it is purely personal, and interpreted with all the freshness and wholesome vitality characteristic of the American life of today. And if I suggested that we are sometimes reminded of Corot, it is simply the result of a temperamental accident, of an almost similar attitude towards the wondrous beauties of Nature."[149] Tonalism had become a distinctly national style.

What is surprising about Murphy's work after 1900, given all the accolades and popular appeal for charm and serenity and low-toned beauty, is how much it had evolved—incrementally but always intelligently and tellingly—and not just in the years before 1900, but over the ensuing decades; how radically simplified it became, how given over to the purest expressive power. A Murphy landscape is always recognizable as a Murphy, but rarely does the artist's work suffer repetition. Although Murphy painted his share of tame potboilers, he was free enough from financial worry and confident enough in his talent to paint as he saw fit, letting the art world follow his lead—or not. His buyers were not unsophisticated. Murphy's late style of spare essentials, personal symbolism, and improvisations on a chosen theme is reminiscent of the way in which Inness worked late in life. The great raging expression of Inness is, in Murphy, translated into exquisite variations on an autumnal theme, a Bach cello suite to Inness's Beethoven symphonic pastoral. In addition, the late work represents a culmination of all that had gone before, the logical extension of Murphy's predilections for the telling note or a stark and dramatic read. In the last twenty years of his life, the artist moved inexorably toward an iconic symbolism that, even in light of his earliest paintings, seems always to lurk just below the surface. In *Autumn Hillside*, 1905 (fig. 4.67), trees, hazy tree lines, mown meadows, summer's vagrant flowers, even farm buildings, seem to express both idiosyncratic and universal meanings, both in eerie isolation and intriguing juxtaposition.

Murphy, a retiring sort, always happiest fleeing the bustle of New York for "Weedwild," painted with an innate sophistication that was often not immediately evident. His letters to his wife portray a very private man, leery of crowds and public duties, yearning constantly for the silence and solitude of the Catskills. He was not immune from the currents of international modernism at the turn of the century. He sat on innumerable exhibition juries and was considered a fine and fair judge of art. He read deeply and widely. His unconscious demons—especially the poverty of his youth—were assuaged in the landscapes he knew and loved. The barren fall landscapes of the Catskills were a kind of emotional palimpsest upon which

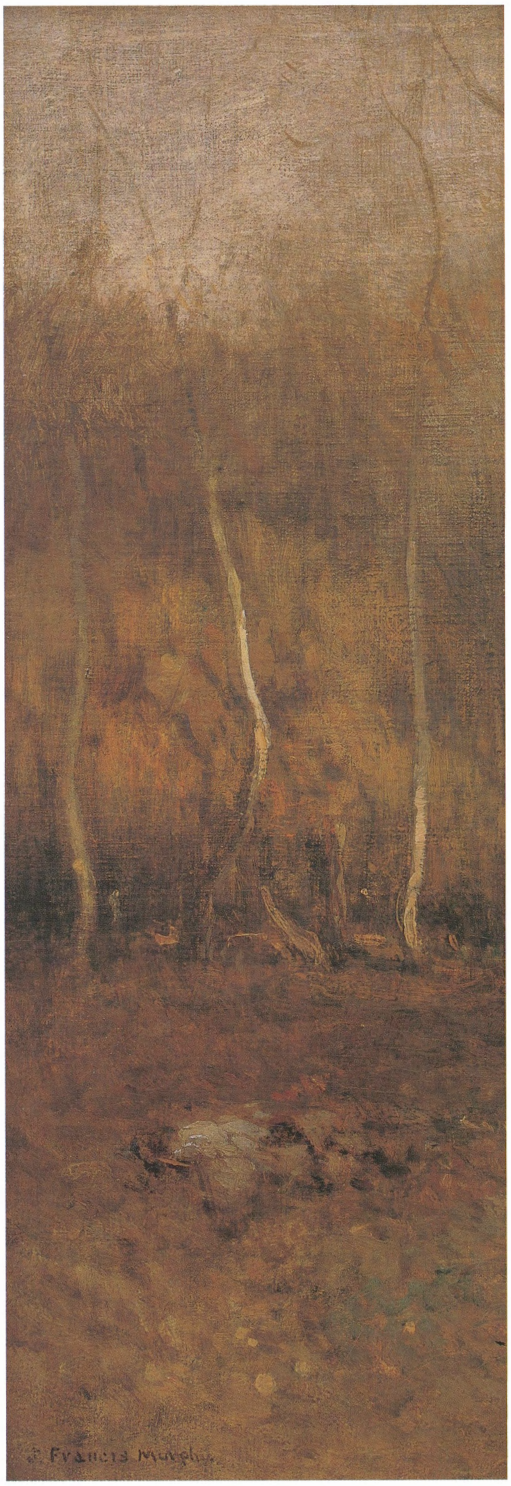


Fig. 4.66. J. Francis Murphy, *The Three Trees*, c. 1910. Oil on board, 13½ x 5 in. Private collection.

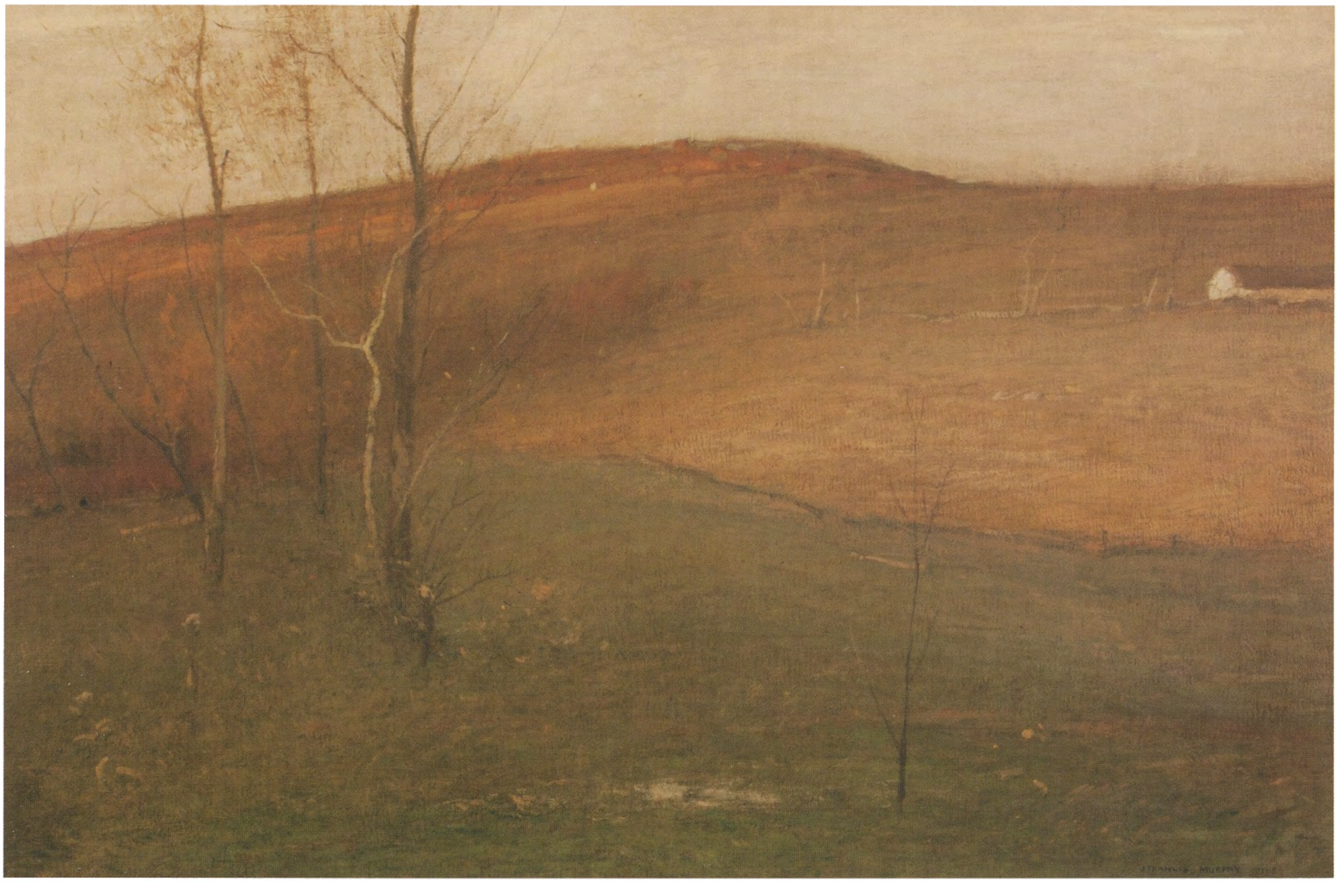


Fig. 4.67. J. Francis Murphy, *Autumn Hillside*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Private collection.

he was forever writing another chapter. Here, too, amid the rocky farmed-out hills, he indulged his skills as a consummate craftsman with meticulously prepared impastoed grounds, pushing his surface textures to gain new qualities of expression, much as Blakelock had done in the 1890s. As he wrote to his wife in 1900 from the Catskills: "I have just commenced to daub on one or two canvases, getting them ready. You know that with me a well prepared canvas is a picture half done." The history of Murphy's last two decades, as Eliot Clark has pointed out, was a constant winnowing of his art to the pithy core, to purer and purer expressions, until the hand of the artist was as embedded in his art as the stones harbored in the hardscrabble soil of Weedwild.

"In comparison with the earlier pictures the key is heightened and the range of values diminished. The chiaroscuro and the concentration of light at the focal point, so characteristic of the earlier work, is replaced by an evenness of lighting and a diffused radiance. The atmospheric envelopment is carried to the highest degree of unity consistent with subtle variation. The oneness of effect is expressed without focal concentration and the emphasis is given more by the decisive accent than descriptive detail. Thus there is a certain concentration of the vision produced more by the arrangement of mass and the calculated spotting of foreground objects than by the more photographic tightening of the focus by means of defining detail. This gives that largeness of view, the feeling of expanse, of height and breadth and depth. The form is everywhere merely suggestive and entirely related to the mass."[150]

By 1905, Murphy's underlying drive toward abstraction reached its first crescendo. In *Intervale*, 1905 (fig. 4.68), the artist's impastoed grounds serve both to provide structure and form for the larger landscape masses. With palette knife and pumice Murphy approximates the textures of his subject,

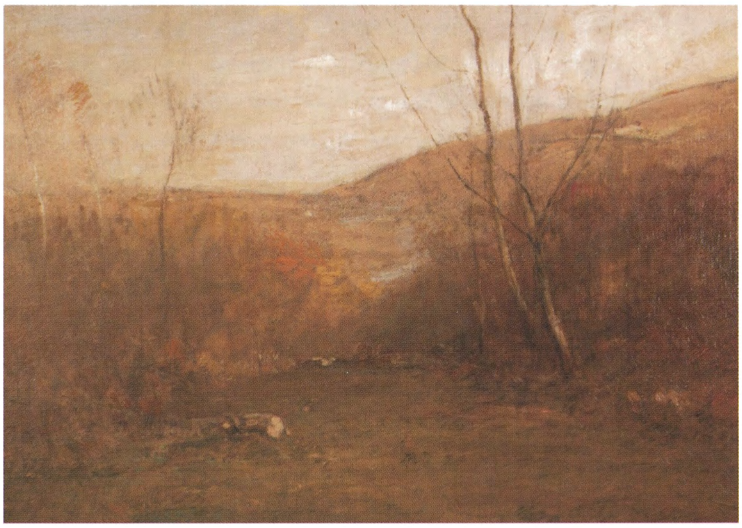


Fig. 4.68. J. Francis Murphy, *Intervale*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 14 x 19 in. Private collection.

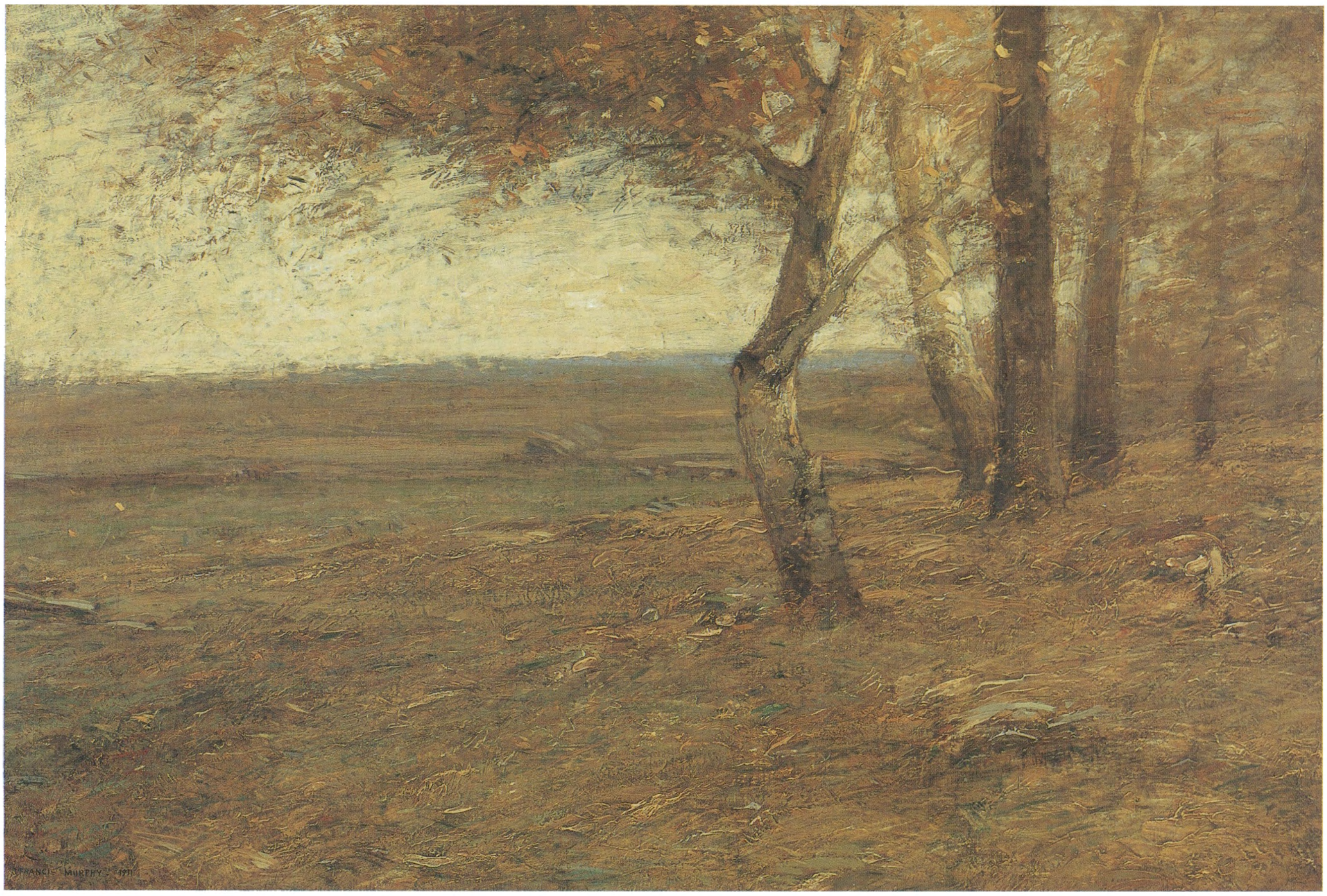


Fig. 4.69. J. Francis Murphy, *On the Brow of the Knoll*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. The O'Brien Collection of American Art, Sewickley, PA.

the very feel of the rocks, earth, and trees depicted. His art becomes truly improvisatory. Trees, logs, fences, rocks, the angle of a barn roof—these bare bones of descriptive detail are reduced to quickening accents, an artist's shorthand to anchor the broader masses and forms of landscape. All is sacrificed to pictorial rhythm, structural unity, and largeness of atmosphere. The lush edenic pastures of the middle period are replaced by spare and schematic renderings of sere upland hillsides. Fall permeates Murphy's late art. Many of the paintings of this period consist of arrangements of earth tones, yellow ocher, gold ocher, raw sienna, and the various reds, a tone sequencing as subtle as Whistler's use of blues and grays in the Nocturnes. Murphy composed his tonal sequences and simple atmospheric ensembles to harmonize with the deep gold frames that housed them, producing a remarkable quietist art.

It may be that Murphy's discovery of emerald oxide of chromium in early 1902 had a dramatic effect on his landscapes, inspiring many of his large expansive compositions filled with lush but muted greens.[151] Murphy's trees in these years become summary jottings, mere phantoms, a uniquely symbolic rendition that flowed from the artist's hand like the finest calligraphy. The spindly birch, the slender second-growth sapling found in a woodlot or by a pasture's edge, became his preferred subject. The heavy feel of the earth seeps through in the pronounced surface texture, as Murphy's underpainting becomes a subject in its own right. In these years his craggy, weathered impasto approaches a personal mannerism. The artist began experimenting by laying in his pigment grounds with a palette knife, then smoothing them to a lacquerlike finish, which, after being left to dry, he took up and scraped with pumice to roughen the surface, thus obtaining a sympathetic approximation of the weight of the earth or the feathery stillness of a fall sky. Such jewel-like textures of tone and minimalist jottings of color both draw the eye to the surface plane and submerge the senses in smoky depths. Value relations are further harmonized by the play of refracted edges and sinuous accents. It is as if the bare bones of hills and fields have been exposed to view by some organic process of erosion, the artist's hand and that of the Creator approaching some elemental synthesis. The achievement of Murphy's best work, as in *On the Brow of the Knoll*, 1911, exhibited in the Carnegie International of the same year (fig. 4.69), is that by exuberant improvisation—the fissured and galvanic brushwork continually draws in the viewer's gaze—the artist has fashioned images with the carrying power of living nature: means and ends, subject and object, become fused in the mind's eye. Though the work depicts a place the viewer may have never known, the place feels familiar because of the way

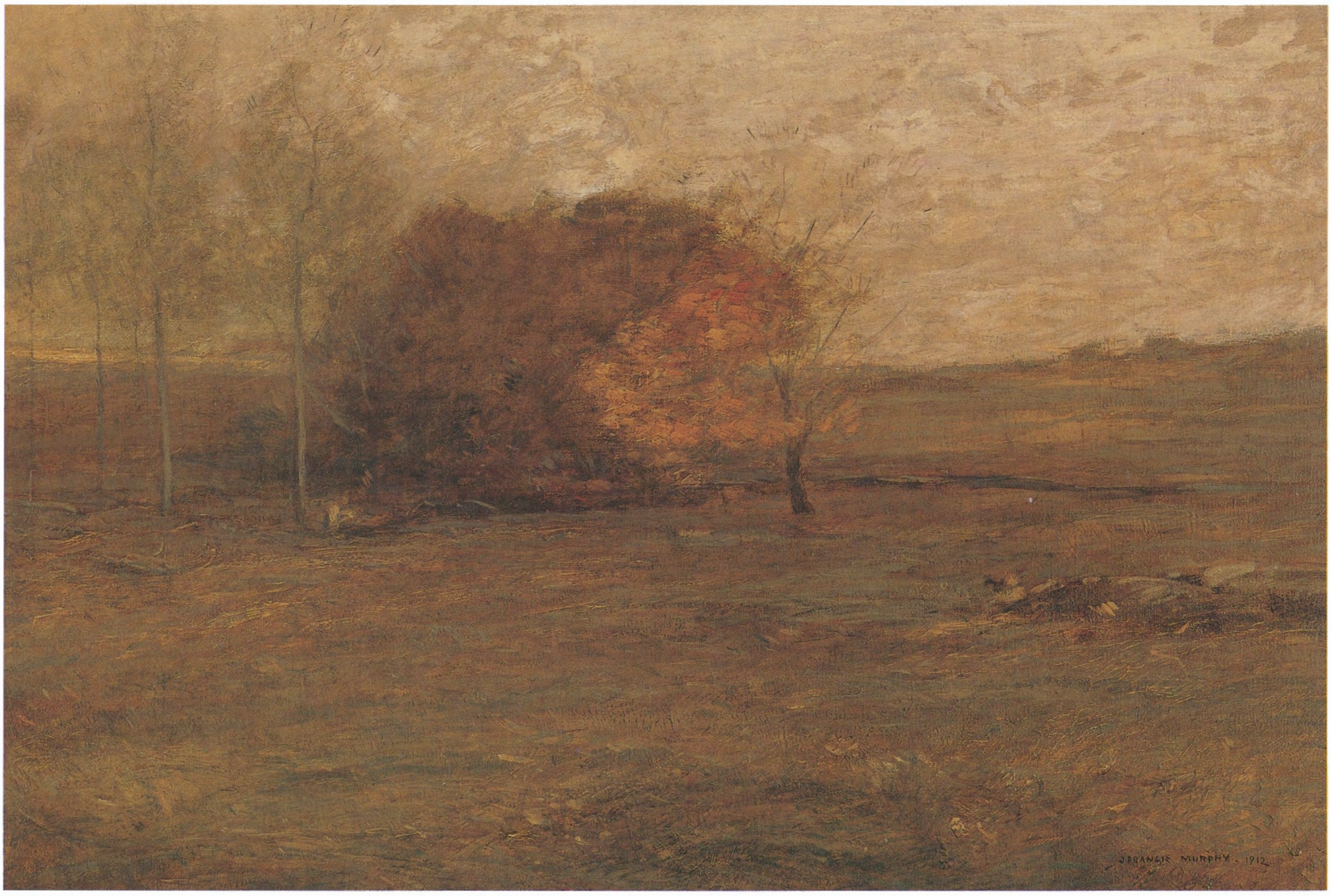


Fig. 4.70. J. Francis Murphy, *Autumn*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 24 ½ x 36 ¼, in. The Detroit Institute of Arts.

in which these stark expressive symbols—the rustling blur of trees on a knoll—tap into memory and imagination.

Autumn, 1912 (fig. 4.70), is another triumph of lush variegated surface textures, delicate calligraphic tree forms, greens of hypnotic intensity, and a simple composition that is nevertheless endlessly complex in its suggestiveness. Refracted edges fade in and out of view; tree trunks establish rhythmic processions at once ordinary and yet unnaturally geometric, perplexing the eye, while focal points beg analysis—a rock outcropping, a stone wall, a scrim of leafage, a roofline on the horizon—both as familiar detail, the known or expected, but also transformed into an aesthetic moment of expressed feeling in paint. The brushstroke is subtle, facile, and rhythmic—subsumed in the overall effect. The artist's color is related to value and this to the prevailing quality of light: it comes from the eye of a Tonalist rather than that of a pure colorist. Within the limited range of greens in *Autumn*, the artist has produced a symphonic array of harmonic variations. By working in the middle register of color in value and intensity, Murphy stresses relations rather than contrasts. The contrasts of surface impasto and the liquid, almost living paint are as thrilling to the touch as to the eye. Murphy's surfaces are unrivaled in the expression of sincere, deeply rooted feeling, as if the artist were calling up the poetic exactitude of Thoreau, the nature poet, analyzing some natural phenomenon in his journal. In this increasingly expressive character of his late work, Murphy was both setting an example and following the lead of many of his contemporaries toward a more vigorous and large-scaled Expressive Tonalism after 1900.

Writing of Murphy in 1926, his biographer Eliot Clark, who was the son of the painter Walter Clark (a founding member of the Society of American Landscape Painters with Murphy), saw the artist as epitomizing his era. "The content of Murphy's art is, however, in no way unique. It was the common property of his epoch. He has given no new idea or subject matter; he has invented no new design or aesthetic innovation; his color awakens no new sensation; he has erected no architectonic scaffolding on which others might build. His work is not intellectual. He has stamped his personality on the surface, in the patina, the characteristic touch, the tone sequence and atmospheric envelopment. His expression depends upon the nice relation of harmonious tones and tender gradation within a well-balanced compositional theme, imbued with exquisite sensibility and expressive feeling, essentially tranquil and serene, wistful and melancholy... Gradation, envelopment, and tone sequence, apart from representative form, is perhaps the most alluring and ingratiating element in modern painting."[152]

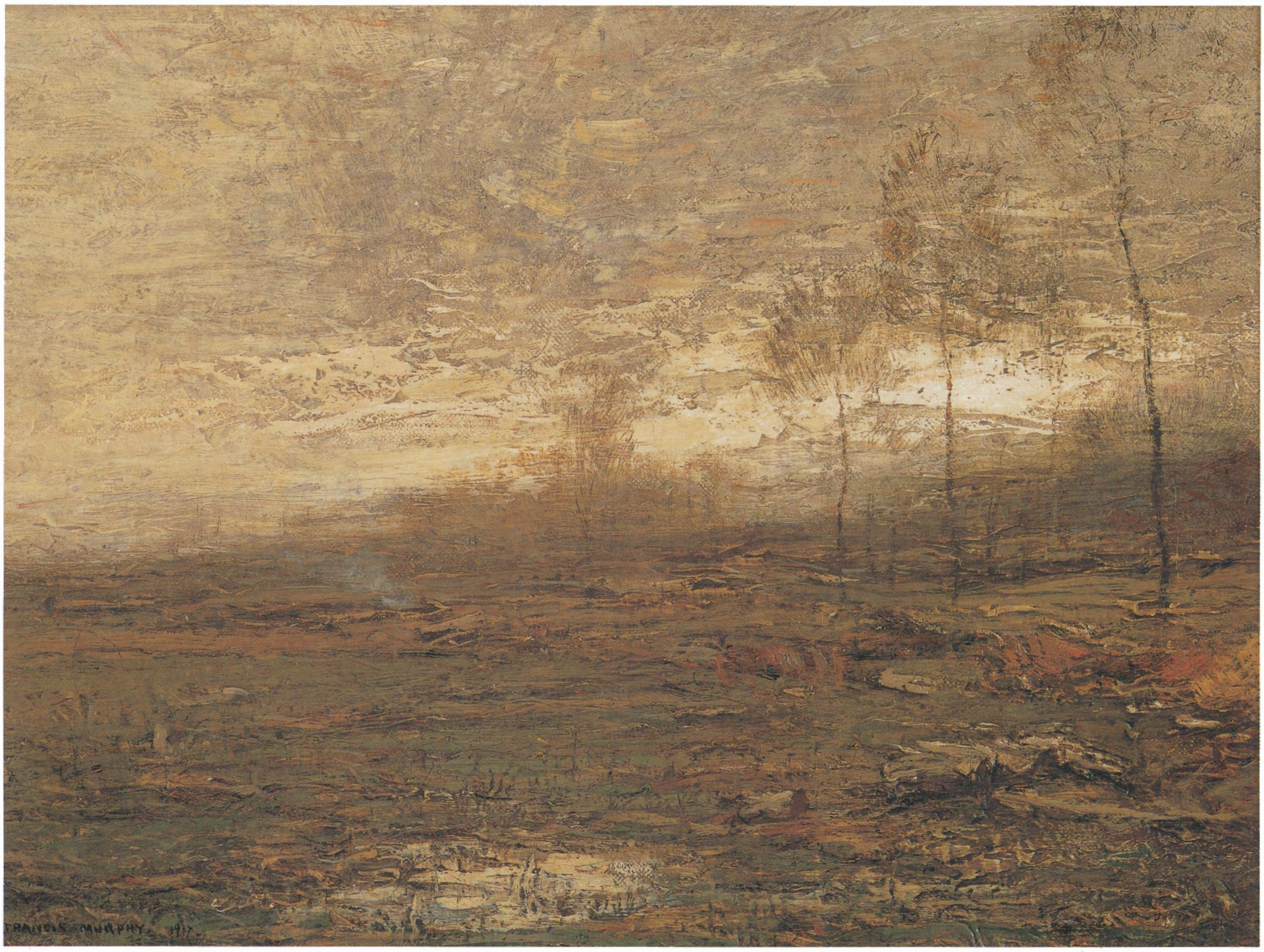


Fig. 4.71. J. Francis Murphy, *The Clearing*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

From the perspective of 1926, with the repercussions of World War I shadowing many horizons, the Great Depression three years away, and modern art from Europe the toast of the jazz age, Murphy's art, even for Eliot Clark, must have seemed to be the product of a bygone era. Clark, himself a painter of vigorous landscapes in the mold of George Bellows, sounded elegiac notes and was defensive of Murphy's—and his father's—generation. But in his elegy for the Tonalist movement, Clark detected the origins and underlying complexities of modernism that passed into the work of Alfred Steiglitz and his circle and others, in which "personal feeling, expressed in tonal relation and enveloped in atmospheric ensemble,"[153] is by the logic of its means concentrated into simple designs of horizontal bands of land and sky broken by the verticals of trees. "The form is never absolute, never fully defined, always suggestive. This suggestion becomes not merely a technical mannerism, but a language in itself, the very means of avoiding the final and decisive, the symbol of uncertainty... Silence, solitude, serenity. A soul bathed in uncertainty, waiting."[154]

It is this uncertainty in stark solitude, couched in the symbols of landscape, that in many ways epitomizes the fin-de-siècle era, as much in Murphy's work as in Whistler's. Perhaps no artists of any era faced the magnitude of change and uncertainty that confronted this generation: the uncertainty of a terrible death-dealing civil war and its aftermath, which saw the dashing of religious certainty in homes across the land; the uncertainty of a wildly jittering capitalist economy; the uncertainty of unchecked growth and the movement of population from countryside to city—cities filling with immigrants as never before: an age of uncertainty capped by the disaster of World War I. Murphy's art was both a symptom of uncertainty and its antidote—epitomized in the artist's escape from the city to his hermitage in the Catskills: a retreat into the known and unknown, into memory and the mystery of memory, in which memory itself was transformed in the process of remembering. This was the modernist paradox of memory that the French writer Marcel Proust, another figure of this era, so famously elucidated. Within his narrow arena of creation, Murphy was a master at dissecting the haunting undercurrents of time and memory. As Clark noted, the most quintessential modernist, Whistler, who put his stamp on the era, found uncanny resonance in the airy upland pastures of Murphy's Catskills abode. "In this respect Murphy is similar to Whistler and strange as it may have seemed to their contemporaries, the two artists

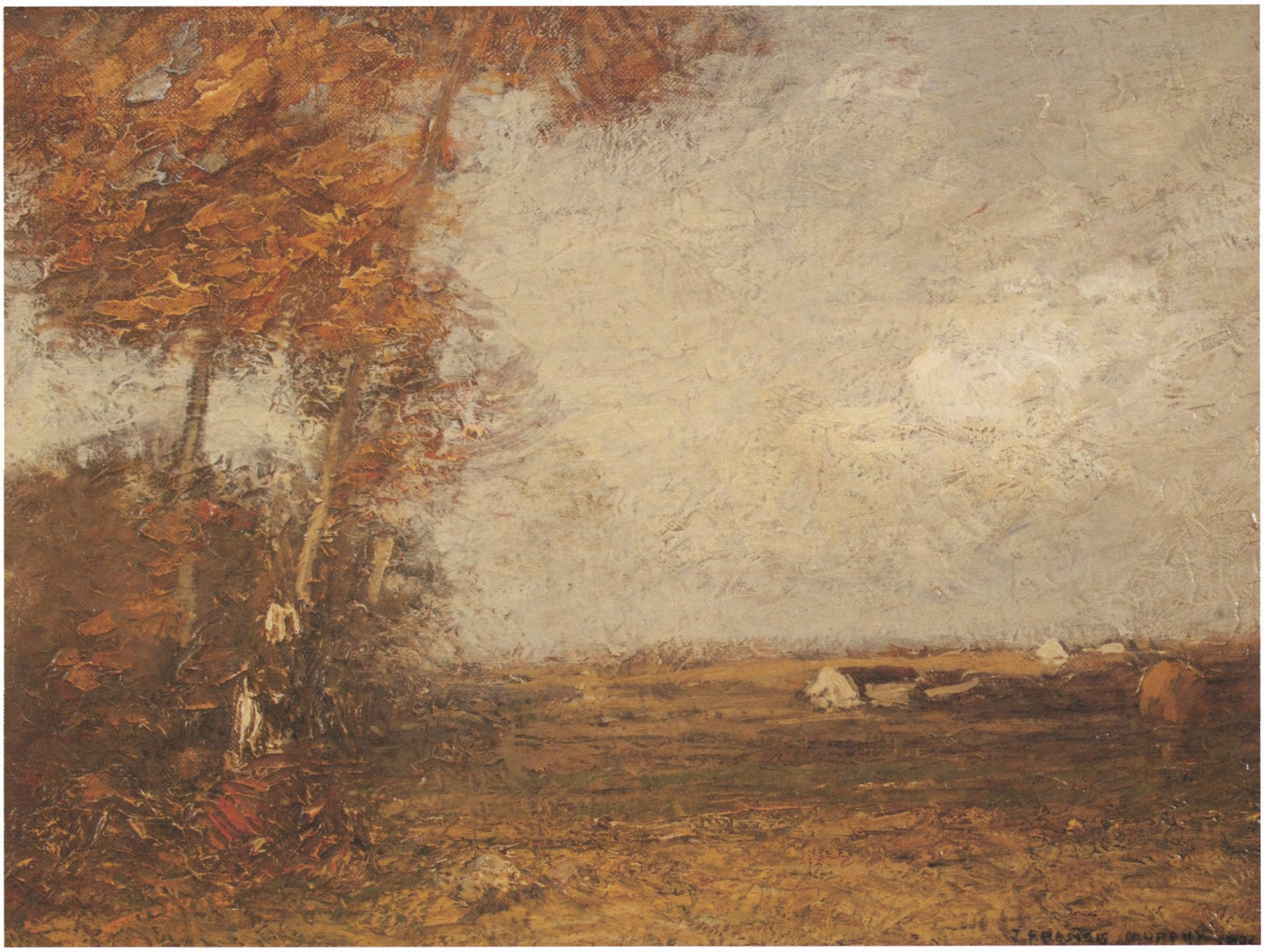
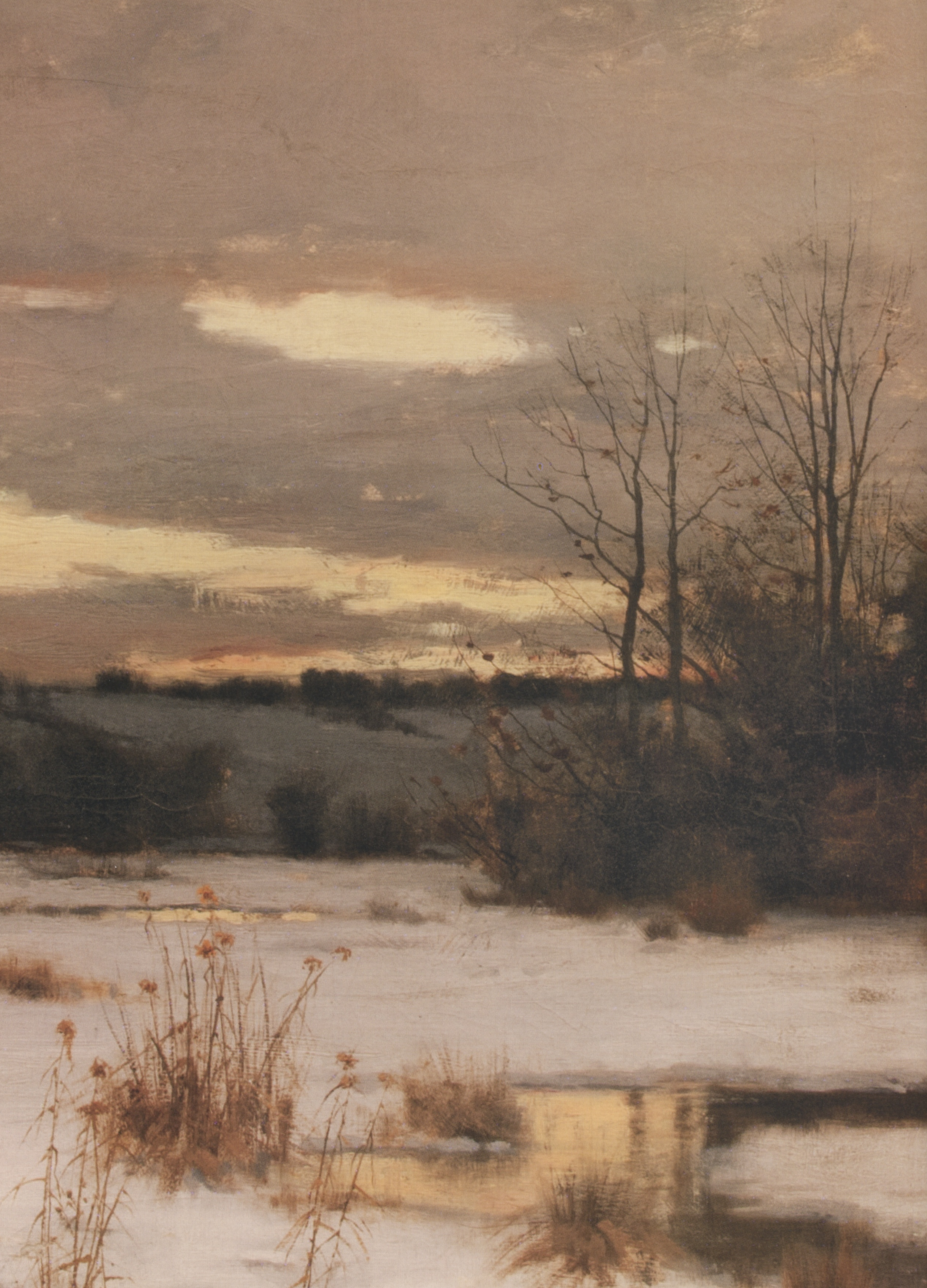


Fig. 4.72. J. Francis Murphy, *Last of the Oaks*, 1921. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

are in many ways closely related. For Murphy, although a rustic in his love of country and retirement, is fastidious and careful to the highest degree in his painting. Both masters worked within a very limited range, both extreme tonalists. Whistler choosing the sequences of gray and neutral hues, and Murphy working within closely related russets and browns; both composing with the most simple linear design—Whistler giving his work something of an oriental flair in decorative pattern and Murphy insisting always on harmonious space relations... their pictures when hanging together belong at once to the same age: vague, suggestive, undefined, mood enveloped."[142] Like Whistler, Murphy had a intuitive perception that matter and form are one, a perception of unity that approaches the contrapuntal rapture of music.

Perhaps one of the most extraordinary things about Murphy was that his powers of innovation and reinvention only increased with age. *The Clearing*, 1917 (fig. 4.71) (which was shown in the Salmagundi Special Exhibition in Memory of J. Francis Murphy), displays a raw bravura of layered and scoured impasto that would do justice to any modernist canvas, with just a few wispy jottings to signify trees and a wraith-like plume of smoke to give the semblance of a bleak rural world. *Last of the Oaks*, 1921 (fig. 4.72), painted just months before Murphy's death, retains an expressive and symbolic power and a feel for the animate life flowing through nature that is undiminished. It is little wonder that his younger contemporaries remained in awe of Murphy's commitment to his personal vision.

Avatars of suggestive mood like Ryder, Blakelock, and Murphy, all "American-grown" and, in Clark's words, "extreme tonalists," matured in the transitional years of the late 1870s and early 1880s. They were pathbreakers in the vanguard with Inness, Martin, Wyant, Gifford, and certainly Currier and Twachtman, artists who solidified the taste for Tonalist landscapes and developed its progressive vision, a vision that defined the look of an era. This was the world the young artists who came to New York in the early 1880s found, on which they cut their teeth; it was the tradition they inherited, added to, and drove to dominance by 1900. It is to the younger artists, born primarily in the 1850s, both American- and foreign-trained—and to the art institutions they founded and energized—that this history now turns.



CHAPTER FIVE

The Democratization of the Tonalist Landscape: Pastels, Watercolors, and Etchings, and Their Influence on the Tonalist Landscape and Aesthetic Tonalism

Art for art's sake is heartless, and soon grows artless—art for the public market is not art at all, but commerce—art for the people's service is a noble, vital, permanent element of human life. [The Institute] must seek to strengthen, deepen, and improve the relation of American literature to the American people, that it may really enrich the common life, promote the liberty of the individual from the slavery of the superficial, and wisely guide and forward men in the pursuit of happiness in pictures, statues, and music.

—Address by Dr. Henry Van Dyke at the first public meeting of the American Institute of Art and Letters, 1900[1]

The formation and growing success of the Society of American Artists after its first exhibition in 1878 sent a jolt of dynamic diversity through the American art world, creating a progressive forum and momentum for the rise of the Tonalist landscape and crucially, a democratic and professional model for new artistic institutions. Central to the success of the society were its rules of jury selection, revised and printed in the society's exhibition catalogue of 1886:

Rule I: Each picture offered for exhibition must pass a preliminary examination by the Board of Nine Jurors, and receive a vote from each. A suitable concealment of the artist's signature shall have been previously made by the person in charge of the Exhibition, to continue until after the final verdict of the Jurors, pending which they shall not criticize or discuss the merits of the picture.

Rule II: The degree of excellence of a picture shall be expressed by the use of a numerical series of ratings—ninety being the highest—decreasing by tens. Each Juror shall indicate his opinion of such picture's merit by a vote which shall be expressed by the integer of the numerical class in which he places it, and these numbers being added together, their sum will give the rank in the series to which their united judgment assigns it.

Rule III: The numerical rating each picture receives shall be at once clearly marked upon the back, and they shall be placed in rows against the wall in the order of their series.

Rule IV: All pictures, except those receiving on the first vote no mark whatever, shall be received the day following the completion of the first examination, a majority of the Jury deciding which pictures shall be subject to a second vote.

Rule V: A two-thirds majority vote of the Jury shall decide with which number in the series rejection outright begins. (At the Exhibition of 1882 all pictures below the rank of thirty were thus rejected.)

These procedures, much more draconian than the selection rules for the National Academy, sent chills down the spines of even the best artists in America: no one, master or neophyte, member or nonmember, would be allowed to escape rigorous scrutiny before being included in the society's prestigious exhibitions. This institutionalization of professional standards was to prove the key to a more open and progressive art scene in America. Objective, fair, and democratic, the society's tough vetting procedures, prompted by the brouhaha over the disastrous 1884 exhibition, when William Merritt Chase was accused of fixing the jury to favor his minions, became the template of critical standards, which in turn encouraged the propagation of art throughout America. What the society had begun in 1878, other innovative art organizations—especially the Art Students League with its independent professional orientation—would take up with a passionate embrace in the following decades. The Tonalist landscape would ride the new current of professional competence, responding to and benefiting from the burgeoning and open market for art in the decades prior to 1900.

In the wake of the founding of the society in 1877, two important art groups came into being that espoused the Tonalist cause in the following decades: The Society of Painters in Pastel in 1882, and The New York Water Color Club in 1890. The growing enthusiasm for the watercolor, pastel, and etching mediums cannot be underestimated in the development and proliferation of the Tonalist landscape in the decades before 1900: the size, style, and technical innovations of the smaller mediums affected the approach to works in oil. The Tonalist movement was additionally served and abetted by a wide range of new organizations. The Society of American Landscape Artists, formed in 1898, was dedicated exclusively to the exhibition and marketing of the Tonalist landscape. The Lotos Club began to actively promote Tonalism after 1892 when the collector William T. Evans took charge of the exhibition

OPPOSITE: Charles Warren Eaton. *Winter Solitude*, 1887 (detail of fig. 5.102).

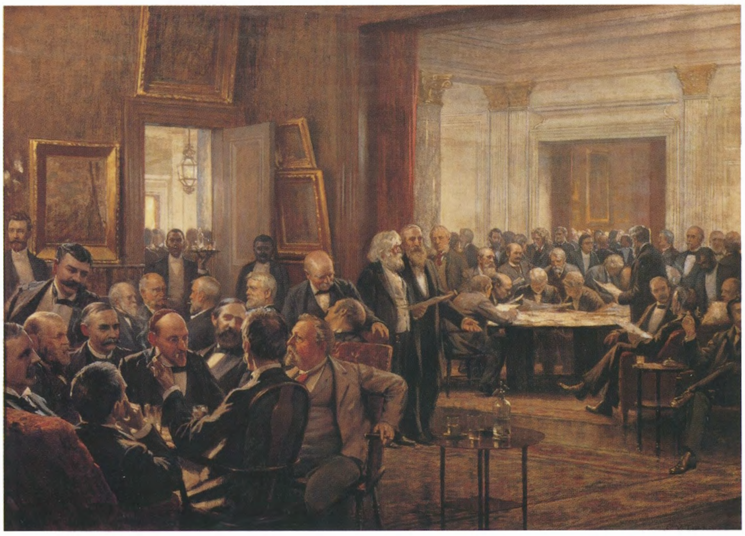


Fig. 5.1. Charles Yardley Turner, *A Saturday Evening at the Century Association*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 25⅞ x 35⅞ in. Courtesy The Century Association.

committee. And the Lotos Club was not alone. Various clubs, including the Salmagundi Club, Century Club, Union League, National Arts Club, Engineers Club, and Athletic Club, among others began to exhibit works by Tonalist artists. The Century Association (the Century Club), founded in 1847, not only provided a social forum for the finest Tonalist artists of the day like John La Farge, Homer Dodge Martin, Alexander Wyant, Robert Swain Gifford, and many others (Charles de Kay and William Gilder were also members), but also actively promoted their work and progressive art in general (fig. 5.1). Behind the scenes, de Kay and the Gilder circle weighed in with hundreds of reviews and articles in the *New York Times*, *Scribner's Magazine*, and then *The Century Magazine*, touting and directly aiding the progressives. This reform-minded spirit was hardly confined to the fine arts; the pages of *The Century Magazine* contained in-depth articles on Darwin, Thoreau, Asian art and culture (La Farge's letters from Japan on Buddhism and mysticism were first printed in *The Century*), and innovations in science and technology. In the same period, the National Academy of Design, under pressure from the radical Society of American Artists—and with de Kay barking at its shins—slowly liberalized its policies and adjusted its jury selection process until by 1900 there was little to distinguish the exhibitions of the two groups: the scaled-down Tonalist landscape dominated the annual exhibitions of both, although near the turn of the century there was a pronounced trend toward larger and more expressive landscapes as the art market prospered and the early bravura style of paint handling, first promoted by the Munich artists, saw a resurgence, abetted by impressionist facture and Whistler's late style, and characterized by greater expressive freedom.

But the proliferation of watercolors, pastels, and etchings after 1880 was a key factor both in the stylistic development of Tonalism and the availability of fine art for the growing middle class. The creation of the Society of Painters in Pastel in 1882 provided a new forum for the development of the more affordable pastel, in style and format promoted by the muted subtleties of Whistlerian aestheticism. Whistler's ethos of decorative intimacy favored the small-scale artwork, especially the etching, pastel, and watercolor, but also the intimate easel painting; these highly decorative and charming works of Aesthetic Tonalism would have their heyday between 1880 and 1900, when larger oils again began to be favored. The New York Etching Club, formed in 1882, might also be added to the list of organizations promoting tonal landscapes in the last decades of the nineteenth century; artist-etchers, following Whistler's lead, like Robert Swain Gifford, Thomas Moran, Charles Platt, Frank Duveneck, Otto Bacher, and Joseph Pennell created exquisite work in a Tonalist vein before 1900—setting the stage for a full-scale etching revival in the decades after. The formation of the New York Water Color Club in 1890, both exploited this new market niche for moderately priced art and created another forum for Tonalist watercolors and pastels (in some cases merging the mediums), while the club's more professional and democratic standards of jury selection (modeled on the Society of American Artists' 1886 rules)—heeding de Kay's plea for exhibitions featuring quality over quantity—put pressure on the older American Watercolor Society to do the same.

Beyond New York, similar institutional developments occurred in Boston and Philadelphia, and as far afield as Chicago, Detroit, and San Francisco, where new museums, art schools, exhibition venues and annuals, and artist societies sprang up, providing further diffusion of the Aesthetic movement and its associated dispensations of art for art's sake, all of which furthered the interests of the Tonalist landscape. In addition to long-standing commercial galleries in Boston like Doll & Richards, which had handled Americans such as George Inness, John La Farge, J. Francis Murphy, and Charles Melville Dewey, new galleries opened in New York and across the country; the American Art Association was founded in 1879 in New York, specifically to exhibit American art, later followed by William Macbeth in New York, who opened his gallery doors in 1892 to buyers of American art. It is little wonder that Macbeth's first exhibition, *Watercolors by American Artists*, was devoted almost exclusively to Tonalist watercolors by the likes of William Gedney Bunce, Charles Warren Eaton, Charles Harry Eaton, Ben Foster, J. Francis Murphy, and Leonard Ochtman (the watercolors of these artists and others will be examined below). In almost every case, the Tonalist landscape provided the bulk of the sales for the new galleries as they increasingly catered to a rising group of middle-class collectors.

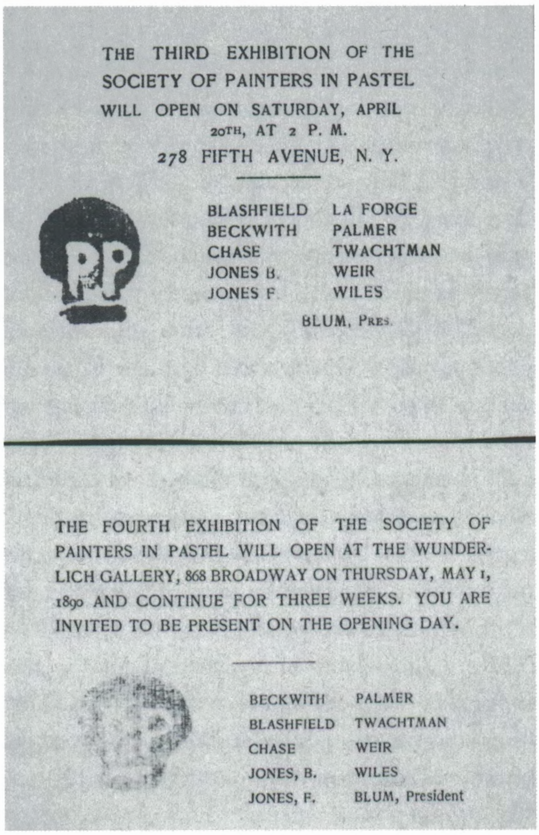
The convergence of all these forces promoted the development of a fundamentally democratic landscape art, especially in the more moderately priced mediums of pastel, watercolor, small oils, and etching; democratic in the sense that it emerged from an open market based on the highest standard of professional competency, and democratic, too, by virtue of Tonalism's inherent abstraction, humble subject matter, and non-narrative character, a genre free of traditional associations with wealth, privilege, and pedigree. The emergence of Tonalism as a national style was akin to the florescence of landscape in seventeenth-century Holland: a fundamentally middle-class Protestant art, selling for affordable prices, depicting the near-at-home and familiar countryside, a genre categorically different in character and spirit from traditional modes of portraiture, genre, and religious subjects, and from their association with rank and privilege. As art historian Kenneth Clark has pointed out in his classic study of landscape art throughout history, the extraordinary emergence of the domestic landscape among the Dutch in the seventeenth century was due to its inherently bourgeois quality, that is, "its art reflected the desire to see portrayed *recognizable* experience."[2] Clark further noted that this desire for recognizable, unidealized views of the Dutch homeland was due to the terrible trauma of the religious wars that had beset the Netherlands in previous decades, an experience not unlike what America had faced after the horrendous bloodletting of the Civil War. In addition, the culture of tolerance and freedom after the repression of the Counter-Reformation opened eyes not only to science and new ideas, but to the natural world in ways more intimate and contemplative than had been the case in the past. As will be seen in chapter 7, the questioning, skeptical, and tolerant attitudes toward religion and science that arose after the Civil War predisposed Americans to a very different relationship to, and appreciation of, nature, a new perspective that the Tonalist depictions of home ground confirmed: it was the land that embodied the core values for which the Union army had fought. American Tonalism, in its soft-spoken intimacy, moody sentiment, soulful reverie, memory-evoked nostalgia, and pantheistic overtones perfectly fit the needs of post–Civil War America.

It is little wonder then that with the possible exception of the work of James McNeill Whistler, the Tonalist landscape rarely found its way into the collections of the wealthiest, and most socially prominent industrialists and bankers of the Gilded Age: J. P. Morgan, Henry K. Frick, Henry Marquand, Isabella Stewart Gardner, the Vanderbilts, and Henry Osborne and Louisine Havermeyer, who invariably concentrated on European old masters as well as French modern and academic painters. The major collectors of American Tonalism, William T. Evans, Thomas B. Clarke, George A. Hearn, John Gellatly, and Charles Lang Freer tended to be astute businessmen, well off but not phenomenally wealthy (with the exception of Freer), who were true connoisseurs of art, and often dealt directly with the artists they admired—many of whom were close friends (often through the Lotos or Century clubs)—as opposed to buying through dealers. Whereas the great American collectors of European art of the Gilded Age enshrined their holdings in magnificent institutions, where they are available to be enjoyed to this day, many of the finest collections of American Tonalism were dispersed in auctions or given to institutions that either deaccessioned them in later decades or relegated them to storerooms, where much of the artwork remains today. This may explain in part the relative invisibility of the humble Tonalist landscape as an important and vital part of the collecting tastes of the upper middle classes during the Gilded Age.[3]

The Society of Painters in Pastel, 1882

The Society of Painters in Pastel (fig. 5.2) was founded in 1882 by members of the Society of American Artists, a critical connection laid out by Charles de Kay in his review of the group's first exhibition in 1884. "A small close corporation of young painters, chiefly a little circle in the Society of American Artists, consisting of Messrs. Beckwith, Blashfield, Blum, Chase, Bolton-Jones, F. Miller, Ulrich, and McCucheon, have given themselves up this Winter to the fascinations of pastel."[4]

For art-world cognoscenti, the imprimatur of the Society of Amrican Artists on the new group would have been enough



THE THIRD EXHIBITION OF THE
SOCIETY OF PAINTERS IN PASTEL
WILL OPEN ON SATURDAY, APRIL
20TH, AT 2 P. M.
278 FIFTH AVENUE, N. Y.

BLASHFIELD
BECKWITH
CHASE
JONES B.
JONES F.

LA FORGE
PALMER
TWACHTMAN
WEIR
WILES

BLUM, PRES.

THE FOURTH EXHIBITION OF THE SOCIETY OF PAINTERS IN PASTEL WILL OPEN AT THE WUNDERLICH GALLERY, 868 BROADWAY ON THURSDAY, MAY 1, 1890 AND CONTINUE FOR THREE WEEKS. YOU ARE INVITED TO BE PRESENT ON THE OPENING DAY.

BECKWITH
BLASHFIELD
CHASE
JONES, B.
JONES, F.

PALMER
TWACHTMAN
WEIR
WILES
BLUM, President

Fig. 5.2. Announcement of The Third Exhibition of the Society of Painters in Pastel, 1889.

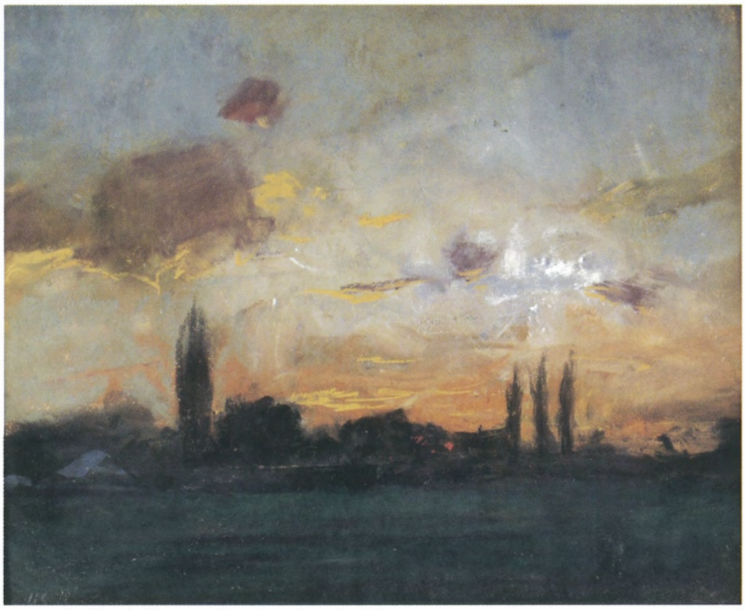


Fig. 5.3. J. Frank Currier, *Twilight in Schleissheim*, c. 1880. Pastel on paper, 6 x 8 in. Private collection.

to assure its place as a galvanizing force. De Kay probably had been consulted about plans for the pastel society, for his first review promotes the group using the same lecturing approach he had employed at the inception of the Society of American Artists. The first half of his review consisted of an apology for the pastel, emphasizing to readers that the pastel was no longer a second-rate medium, laboring "under the contempt of artists and amateurs ... But it has happened recently that artists of the very highest quality have thought it worthwhile to demonstrate that pastels do not deserve the contempt in which they are held, but have qualities very attractive to the painter who uses them intelligently, and that they are capable certainly of as much expression as etching and possibly of as much as water-colors." After reviewing the checkered history of the pastel, de Kay cited as support for the renewed esteem of the medium the work of Jean-François Millet, Giuseppe de Nittis, and James McNeill Whistler, whose pastels of Venice sealed de Kay's argument. "But Whistler is in all probability the finest living draughtsman in pastels, as he is by many held to be the finest etcher ... his Venetian and London landscapes and marines on papers of different colors are so brilliant, fantastic, and suggestive that it is hard to imagine another his equal." De Kay, after assuring his readers of the stability of the medium properly framed under glass, notes the expressive uniqueness achieved by the best exponents: "Theirs is the charm of the charcoal drawing plus color. The stroke to be made can be easily calculated—its effect foreseen. When it is made, there it lies, definite, bright, true. All degrees of nicety or of vagueness can be indicated ... glass does its part in bringing the picture together with its imperceptible aerial quality ... and there is your pastel, quite charming and gay, not at all one of the bigwigs, the tragedians of the plastic arts, but after it own kind a lightsome and smiling actor in the comedy called genteel!"[5] Charming, vague, suggestive, aerial, and lightsome were all qualities of the Tonalist style, especially in its intimate Whistlerian incarnation.

An artist unnamed but highly regarded by de Kay, whose work inspired Eaton, Chase, and every progressive artist in America, was J. Frank Currier, whose watercolors had made such an impact in the previous years. Although Currier was never a member of the Society of Painters in Pastel, his pastels, like *Twilight in Schleissheim*, circa 1880 (fig. 5.3), were powerful and evocative examples of the expressive potential of the medium. Chase, for one, collected his pastels avidly. De Kay, perhaps only second to his friend and collector William T. Evans as an arbiter of taste, had sounded the claxon for a revolution in American art. The renewal of appreciation for the small-scale mediums would not only result in the resurgence of pastels, watercolors, and etchings in the following decades—placing them on a par with oils—but in the emergence of a distinctive and experimental American style of watercolor unlike anything seen in Europe. Pastels and watercolors were also affordable, thus putting them in reach of the expanding ranks of middle-class art buyers. Whistler may have been the demiurge of the Society of American Artists, then almost exclusively devoted to oils, but it was in the mediums of pastel, watercolor, and etching that his influence first took hold in the American art world of the 1880s, the formal and decorative aspects of his art infusing Aesthetic Tonalism with its distinctive intimacy and charm, as in *Venice Street*, circa 1879–80 (fig. 5.4). This early influence was in turn transformed in succeeding decades when Whistler's late international style of expressive and tenebrous tonality came to dominate both sides of the Atlantic, and larger works in oil again came into prominence.

It is also no coincidence that the prime movers in the creation of the Society of Painters in Pastel, Robert Blum (the group's president) and William Merritt Chase, were both friends and followers of Whistler. Blum was one of the few artists active in New York who had firsthand experience of Whistler in Venice, where he had been able to observe the master's technique. Perhaps no body of artistic work has so dramatically influenced art history as Whistler' achievements in pastel and etching during a year's stay in Venice—possibly equaling if not surpassing, in terms of lasting modernist influence, what Monet, Manet, and Renoir produced at Argenteuil in 1874. Chase, too, knew Whistler's pastels from close observation, but tended to adhere to a heavier and more fully worked painterly method derived from his Munich training of creating with rich impasto. Blum, on the other hand, adopted Whistler's sketchy and suggestive style as well as any American of his generation, with the possible exception of John Henry Twachtman. De Kay singled out both Blum and Chase for praise, especially their landscape work, while critic

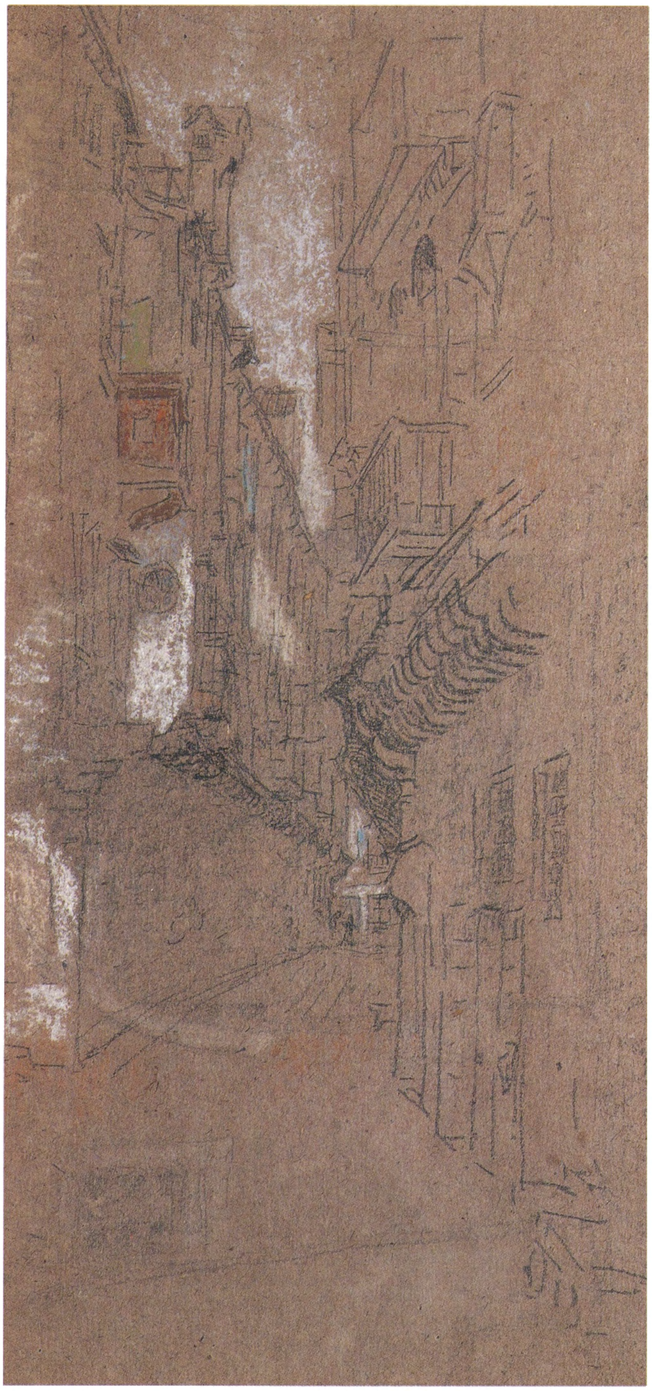


Fig. 5.4. James McNeill Whistler, *Venice Street*, c. 1879–80. Chalk and pastel on paper, 11⅞ x 5⅜ in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

Mariana Van Rensselaer, taking up de Kay's lead in December 1884 in *The Century Magazine*, echoed his sentiments on the possibilities of the new small-scale mediums. "I think we failed to appreciate these arts [watercolor, etching, and pastel] in other days partly because they were comparatively unfamiliar to our eyes, but chiefly because we felt no desire for the expressional facilities they offer. Absolutely unknown they were not, but their germs lay dormant till we awoke to a wider wish for self-expression."[6] More prescient for the future of the medium in America was a review in the *London Art Journal* that praised

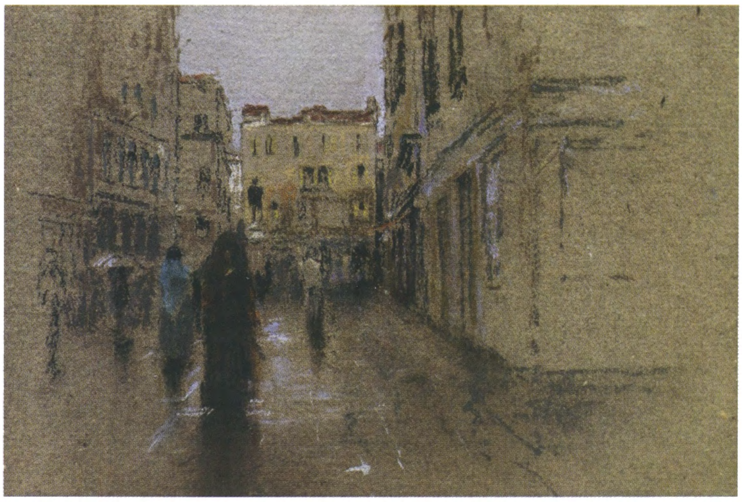


Fig. 5.5. Robert Frederick Blum. *Somber Venice*, c. 1886–87. Pastel on dark gray paper, 8¹⁄₁₆ x 11¹⁵⁄₁₆ in. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, 1955.1567.

the audacity of style and treatment in the Society of Painters in Pastel exhibition, "which had it been held in London or Paris instead of New York, it is safe to say would have created a stir as one of the marked expositions of the year. It being considered remarkable in New York, as the original work of American Painters, makes it no less extraordinary, however, but rather more so."[7]

Not until 1888 was another exhibition held, after a hiatus of four years that was explained by de Kay: ". . . nothing has been heard of the Painters in Pastel, possibly because all the members who were not made officers declined to pay their dues."[8] As de Kay noted, by 1888 Whistler's influence was firmly entrenched and Venice was all the rage, nowhere more strikingly than in Robert Frederick Blum and John Henry Twachtman's pastels. "Mr. Robert Blum rivals Whistler in his ability to give the moods of Venice." In *Somber Venice* (one of seven Venetian works by Blum), circa 1886–87 (fig. 5.5), "drawn on dark-gray cartridge paper, is a street paved with smooth stones and peopled with shadowy figures." Though lacking Whistler's inspired lightness of touch and ethereality, Blum's work reflects the full repertoire of Whistler's technical tricks: the toned paper—de Kay notes the colored papers throughout his review—serves as the ground for the composition, the architecture is only suggested with a few strokes of dark crayon, and patches of pure color add highlights and charm, and a sense of animation to the hurrying pedestrians. Critics of the 1888 pastel exhibition noted the Whistlerian influence, sometimes scolding Blum for bothering to imitate the signature style of the expatriate aesthete. Others took delight in the "facile cleverness" of Blum, noting: "the same brilliant touch and the same leaning to Whistlerianism, with sometimes an exaggerated estimate of the tone-value of the paper."[9] Whereas the first exhibition of the pastel group had been mostly portraits, still lifes, and genre subjects, the second

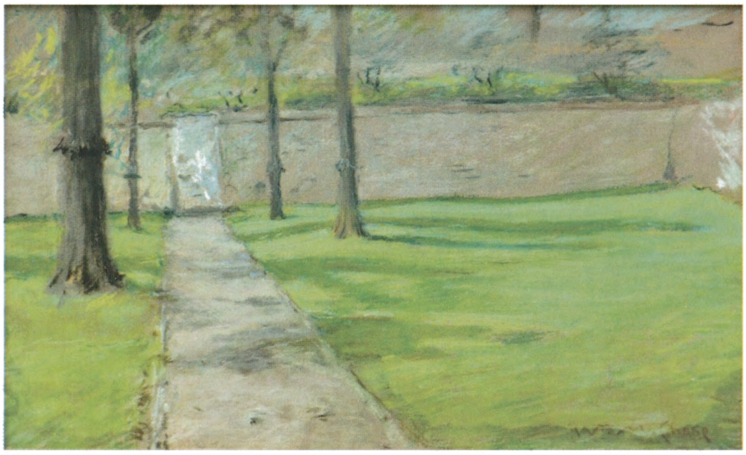


Fig. 5.6. William Merritt Chase, *A Bit of Sunlight (Garden Wall)*, c. 1888. Pastel, 7½ x 10½ in. Courtesy MME Fine Arts.

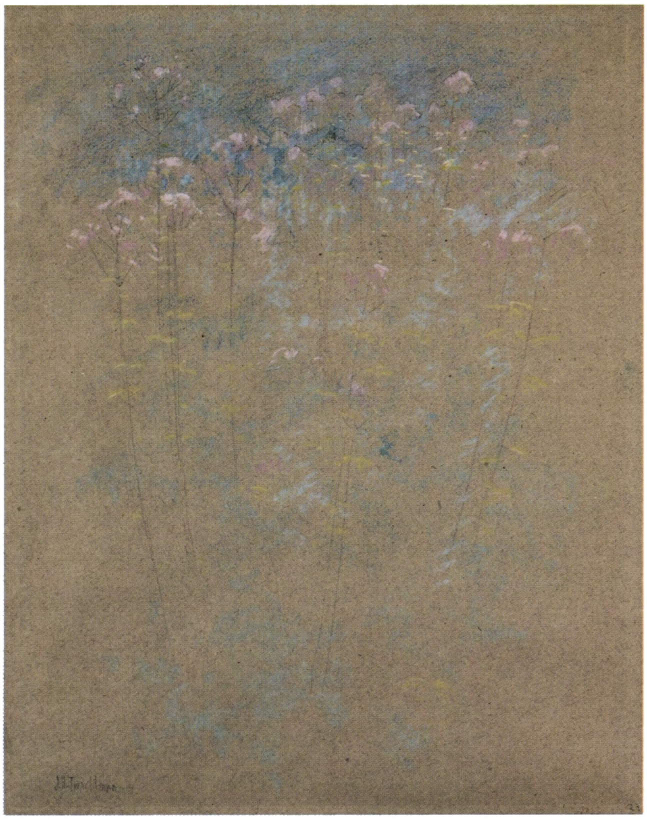


Fig. 5.7. John Henry Twachtman, *Weeds and Flowers*, c. 1889–91. Pastel on paperboard, 19 x 15 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

contained many more landscapes, many by Twachtman, who weighed in with Venetian scenes and landscapes, enough to make de Kay swoon. "Mr. Twachtman has also had his Venetian fever, and at least one of the pastels, "Gray Venice," hardly yields to the best by Whistler and is better than many by the later. Here the perspective is fine, the drawing tender, the pink on walls and roofs brilliant yet of the utmost delicacy."[10]

If any artist stood out over the short life of the Society of Painters in Pastel, it was surely John Henry Twachtman, who participated in the last three exhibitions, not only setting the standard for the Whistlerian mode but taking it to unparalleled levels of refinement unequaled in America or Europe. Whereas a master craftsman like William Merritt Chase could produce gorgeous nudes and landscapes of parks and suburban views in pastel, he tended to eschew the sketchy airiness of Whistler for a more painterly and finished look, often with flourishes of sumptuous detail. Nevertheless, in a pastel such as *A Bit of Sunlight (Garden Wall)*, circa 1888 (fig. 5.6), Chase achieves a cool Whistlerian tonality throughout with utmost simplicity of form and design. Even more to the point, Whistler's influence is found in the tantalizing balance of the composition, an equilibrium achieved with horizontal and vertical banding of the wall and trees, and yet jarred by the exquisitely tantalizing play of light and shadow, challenging the eye to make sense of the off-kilter patterns set up by the tree shadows crossing the line of the empty path. The green tones of the grassy sward vibrate with pulsing life. Even in such a domestic setting there are intimations of the unseen life in nature. De Kay praised Chase's work, even the artist's pastel nudes for their sensuous naturalism and purity, though they are "still considered by many excellent persons in New York who love the fine arts as a questionable thing to represent."[11] But it is Whistler's example that de Kay holds up as the paradigm for the medium. "The most satisfactory employment of pastels is seen in sketches like those which Mr. Whistler has made the fashion, in which the tinted paper gives the main color and permits the rendering of very delicate and beautiful effects with the least expenditure of chalks."[12] In terms of pastel, Twachtman stretched the medium to levels of refinement rarely equaled by his contemporaries.

By the third exhibition of the Society of Painters in Pastel in 1889, Twachtman was the largest contributor with twenty-two works, and Whistler's influence could be seen everywhere, as noted by Gilder circle insider Thomas Cook, in the *New York Tribune*: "It is art for art's sake which they offer, and it would be idle to ask too much, ungracious not to accord full appreciation to the rare sensitiveness to eye and facility of hand illustrated in their work."[13] It was Twachtman, ever the experimenter, who took Whistler's minimalist mode and exploited its full potential. Twachtman became a member of the Society of Painters in Pastel in 1888, moving on from his European subject matter of 1884–85 to the American landscape, drawing on locales from his Cincinnati birthplace and, later, the Connecticut farm of his friend J. Alden Weir. *Weeds and Flowers*, circa 1889–91 (fig. 5.7), displays Twachtman's serene, almost mystic appreciation for the pure essence of matter, as well as the possibilities of toned papers as integral to the design. Here, the meadow flowers, so beloved by the Tonalists in the foregrounds of their paintings of the 1880s, are rendered in isolated splendor, their subtle color, filigree forms, and vital beauty registering as works of art in their own right. By using colors that approach the tones of the

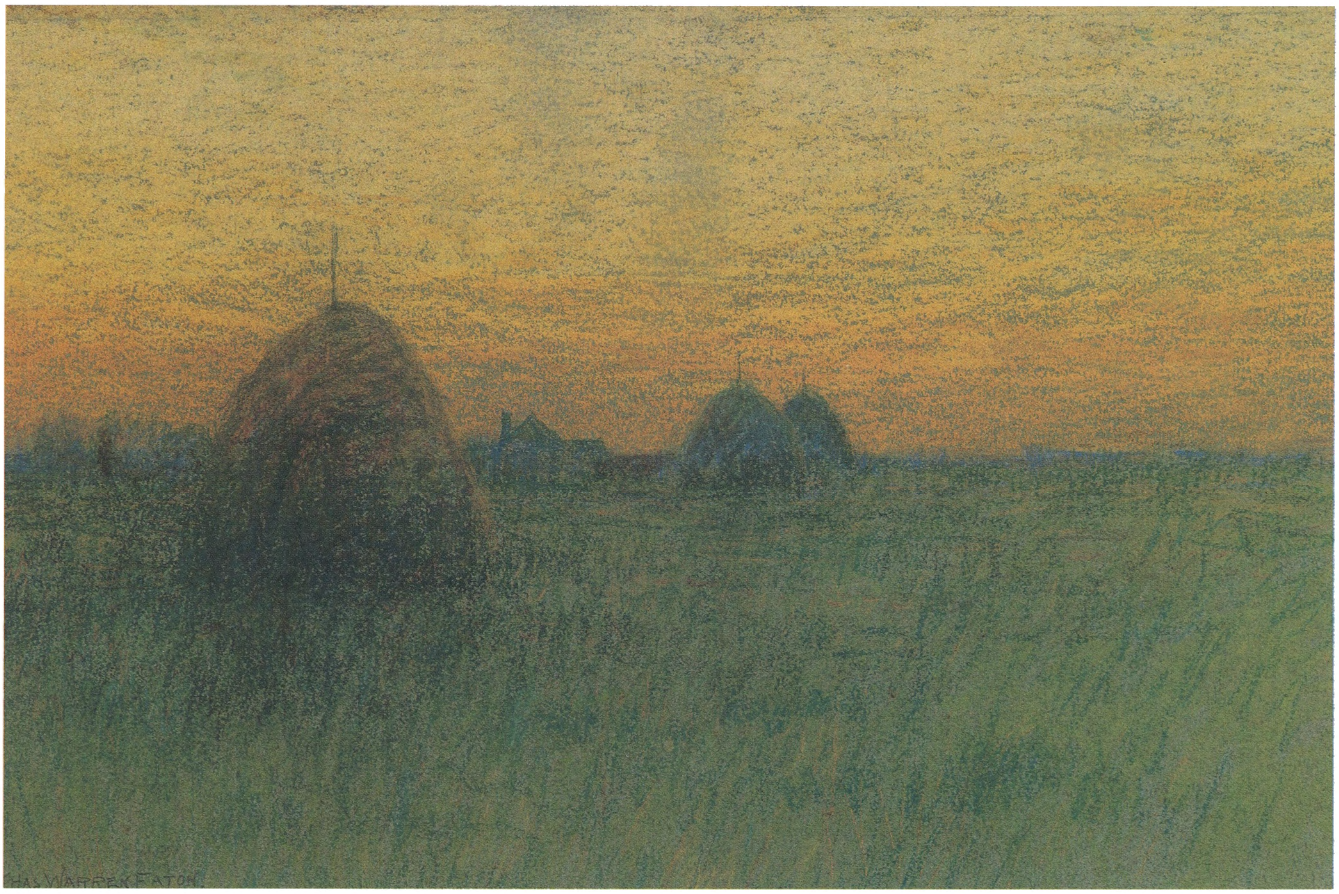


Fig. 5.8. Charles Warren Eaton, *Haystacks at Sunset*, c. 1890. Pastel, 12 x 18 in. Collection of George and Mary Jane Haas.

paper, the artist achieves a synthesis of color and pattern that is both decorative and breathtaking in its formal complexity. This tension between the artifice and the thing represented, between showing and telling, made Twachtman a consummate artist's artist in the eyes of his contemporaries. It also made him one of the most influential artists in the Tonalist mode as it moved into the 1890s, when the nation experienced a severe economic downturn and the moderately priced Tonalist pastel and watercolor provided badly needed income for artists.

The last exhibition of the Society of Painters in Pastel in 1890 marked a turning point in the New York art world. President Blum was in Japan and so did not participate. Twachtman's landscapes were shown in abundance along with landscapes by new contributors Childe Hassam and Charles Warren Eaton. The membership, too, had changed since 1884: in 1890 nearly half the membership consisted of landscapists of a decidedly Tonalist bent (Hugh Bolton Jones, Walter Launt Palmer, Twachtman, and J. Alden Weir). The critical notices for the 1890 show were generally favorable. Wonderful Tonalist landscapes by John La Farge, Birge Harrison, Jones, Weir, Charles Warren Eaton (*Haystacks at Sunset*, circa 1890; fig. 5.8), and Hassam, in addition to Twachtman, had premiered to great advantage. Nevertheless, the pastel society died a natural death. Partly this was due to Blum's absence and subsequent failing health, and later to his preoccupation with mural work, and Chase was too busy with teaching and portraits. Also, the growing popularity of the Tonalist landscape movement might well have discouraged Chase and J. Carroll Beckwith, at heart figurative artists who were dependent on portraits and large-scale oils for income, from pursuing the work of the pastel group any further. De Kay observed in his review of the last exhibition in 1890 that the Society of Painters in Pastel was an "erratic little society . . . a queer little society . . . to which no artist belongs of right." But even more decisive than the lack of cohesiveness during the last year of the pastel society's existence, was the appearance of a number of slightly younger and hungrier landscape artists who started a new group, The New York Water Color Club. The club, which included pastels in its exhibitions, fundamentally absorbed the momentum of Whistler's Aesthetic movement in the small-scale mediums of watercolor and pastel, further professionalizing the field and promoting the artwork to a wider range of collectors. Organizing itself along the lines of the Society of Painters in Pastel, and adopting the jury selection rules of the Society of American Artists, the New York Water Color Club quickly became the premier watercolor and pastel group in America.

The New York Water Color Club, 1890

The formation of the New York Water Color Club in 1890 (fig. 5.9), spearheaded by Childe Hassam, Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, Ben Foster, and Henry B. Snell, was prompted by dissatisfaction with exhibition policies at the American Watercolor Society (founded in 1866) and a desire for an additional fall exhibition venue in which to display and sell small-scale watercolors and pastels. Many years later, Hassam—probably taking more personal credit than was warranted—succinctly noted the young artists' motivations. "I started the Water Color Club, and I was its first president . . . That happened because we wanted to have another exhibit in the Fall. Water colors were so low in price, and it was a more democratic art, as water colors could be sold for much lower prices than the oil paintings and it was the medium of the English speaking people."[14] The success of the Society of American Artists and the Society of Painters in Pastel clearly inspired the founders. The existing American Watercolor Society had been coming under increased criticism both within its ranks and in the press for exhibitions that were too large and too full of second-rate work by amateurs, or "Sunday painters." In 1887, Charles de Kay in an otherwise laudatory review of the American Watercolor Society exhibition of that year, encouraged the group to keep its numbers low: "The society has only to go in this course, reduce the number of pictures to 500, and keep it always there. We have had quantity long enough; the turn of quality is now in order."[15]

The lack of standards and strict vetting policies in the American Watercolor Society meant that the professional artists were often overwhelmed by the amateurs and got short shrift on the best hanging space. This critical issue of how the jury selected exhibitors was broached in one of the early meetings of the New York Water Color Club when members met in Childe Hassam's studio on April 16, 1890. The minutes record the crucial vote: "A discussion followed in regard to the right of each member to have one or more pictures admitted without regard to merit. On motion of Mr. Bicknell a ballot was taken to ascertain the sense of the meeting. 32 votes cast—27 were in favor of refusing even members pictures if they did not meet the approval of jury."[16] This overwhelming vote of confidence in professional standards along the lines of the Society of American Artists' vetting procedures was reflected in the New York Water Color Club's constitution: "All pictures, without exception, will be submitted to the Jury, and its judgment will be final."[17] By instituting strict vetting procedures for members and non-members alike, the young Turks were making sure that the best full-time professional artists would win the most coveted hanging space. In a notice the Club posted in the *New York Times* in 1890, spelling out the group's goals vis-à-vis its rival, the American Watercolor Society, it touted the value of diversity, competition, quality—and quantity control.

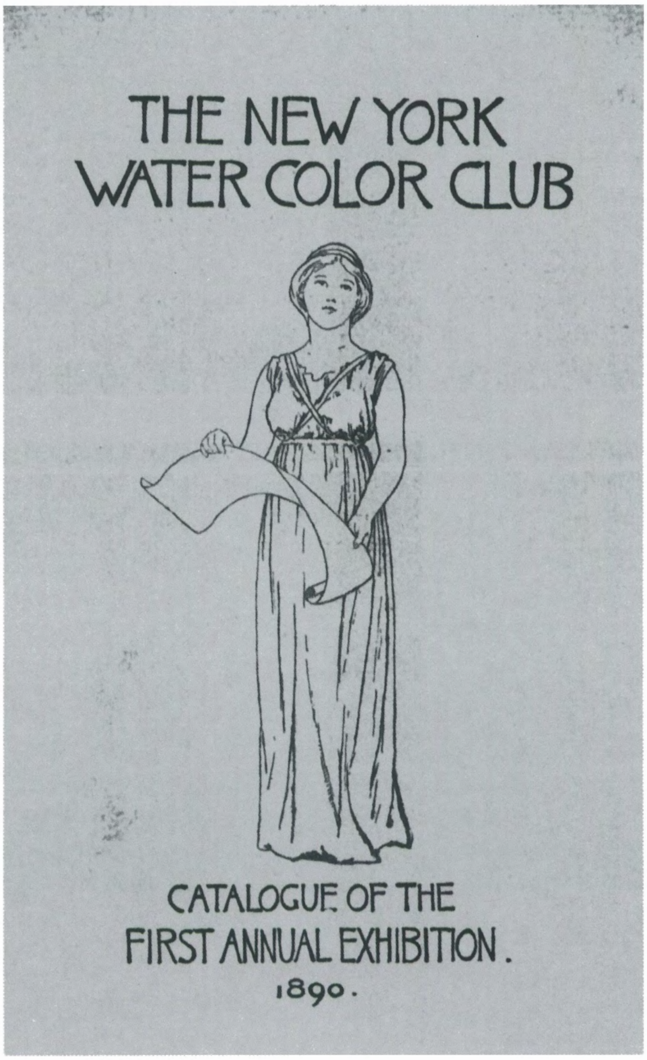


Fig. 5.9. Cover of catalogue for the New York Water Color Club exhibition of 1890.

"The artists who have incorporated themselves as a Water Color Club of New York wish it clearly understood that they have no desire or design to enter the lists against the Water Color Society, which has been so deservedly popular hitherto. They propose to hold their exhibitions in Autumn, and ask the help of the members of the older organization to make a success. This is quite as it should be. Rivalry of a certain kind is good, but not one in which artists withdraw into separate camps. By holding two exhibitions each year in friendly emulation it will be possible to reduce the number of pictures shown at each and raise the standard for admission. The day for huge monopolies like the Paris Salon and the London Royal Academy is past. Convenience, fairness, and common sense alike dictate a number of small exhibitions rather than a few in which the quantity of objects wearies the soul."[18]

Whether de Kay was directly involved with the placing of this notice in the *New York Times*, the sentiments were certainly along lines he had long championed. It is also noteworthy that of the original membership of the New York Water Color Club,

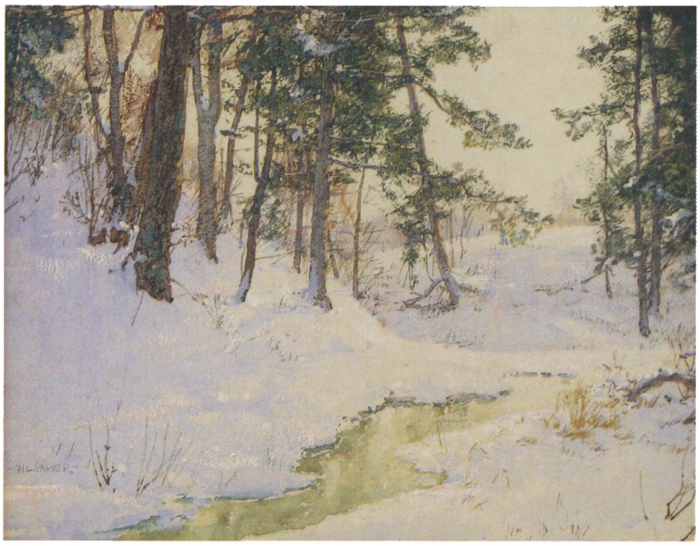


Fig. 5.10. Walter Launt Palmer, *In the Ravine*, c. 1890. Mixed media on paper, 13 x 17 in. Private collection, New Jersey. Courtesy Hawthorne Fine Art.

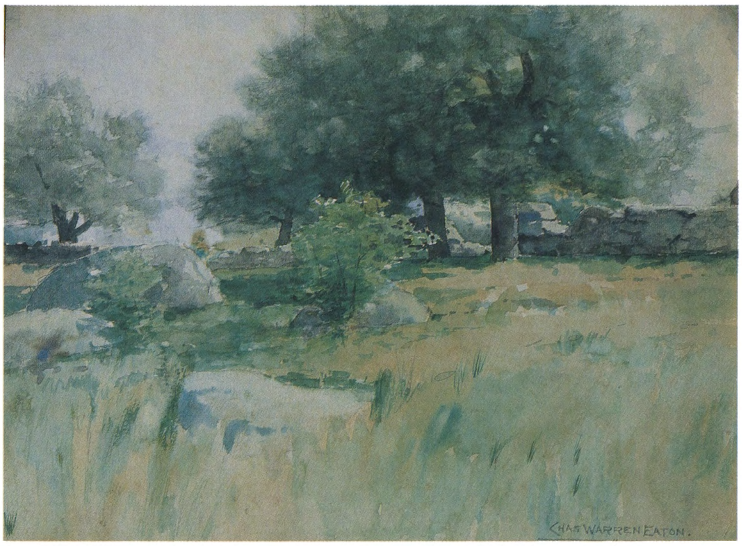


Fig. 5.11. Charles Warren Eaton, *Meadow Walls*, c. 1895. Watercolor, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

half were women, including the watercolorist Rhoda Holmes Nicholls who received a place on the executive board. This, too, was a break with the hidebound policies of the American Watercolor Society, again echoing the more inclusive spirit of the Society of American Artists and the Art Students League in regard to women artists.

The early membership of the club included three holdovers from the 1890 membership roll of the Society of Painters in Pastel: John Henry Twachtman, Walter Launt Palmer (*In the Ravine,* circa 1890, fig. 5.10)—both Tonalists—and Irving Wiles (whose watercolors consisted primarily of landscapes or still life); and the early membership ranks and exhibitors also constitute a who's who of major Tonalist landscapists: George Inness, Charles Warren Eaton (*Meadow Walls*, circa 1895, fig. 5.11), Charles Harry Eaton, Charles Harold Davis (*Sunset Vista*, circa 1880, fig. 5.12), William Lathrop, Arthur Hoeber, Elliott Daingerfield, Henry B. Snell, Ben Foster, Alexander Wyant, Bruce Crane, Charles Melville Dewey, Birge Harrison, Arthur B. Davies, and J. Francis Murphy. Even the president of the Club, Childe Hassam, a dedicated Impressionist for the majority of his career, worked in a decidedly Whistlerian mode in his landscape watercolors and pastels during the first years of the club's existence. The inclusion and encouragement of pastel submissions by the club in its annual exhibitions was probably another factor in making the Society of Painters in Pastel redundant.

The reviews of the first exhibition in 1890 did much to fulfill the hopes of the founders. *Art Amateur* noted, "The average of merit (of the 400 works displayed) is decidedly high, and there are very few extreme departures from it . . . There is an almost total absence of the childish attempts which are displayed every year at more pretentious shows, and which we do not doubt, have often 'crowded out' works as good as those which form the bulk of the present exhibition."[19] De Kay was not pleased with the first exhibition, finding it monotonous with little to differentiate it from the large exhibitions of the American Watercolor Society, which had been the raison d'être for the club's formation. He was also piqued at its commercial tenor: "The collection suggests an enlarged shop, and the new society is seemingly a firm of dealers in art with many partners to it instead of a few." Nevertheless, de Kay sounded a strong nationalist note in terms of the quality of the exhibition. "It is much higher than you find in London at one of the many galleries where water-color societies exhibit."[20] This was a prescient comment, for by the turn of the century, under the guidance of Henry Snell, the New York Water Color Club was determined

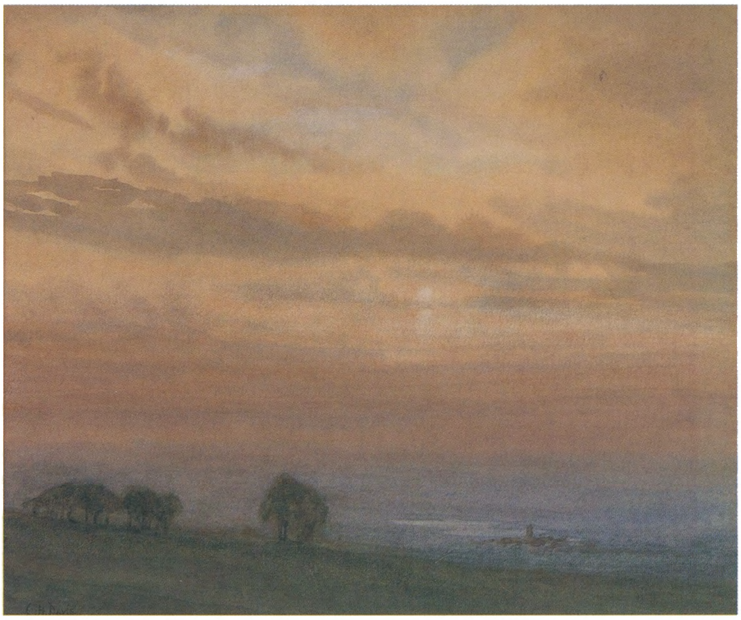


Fig. 5.12. Charles Harold Davis, *Sunset Vista*, c. 1880. Watercolor, 9½ x 11 in. Private collection.

to establish the American watercolor in the forefront of the medium in terms of style and innovation. A year later, in 1891, de Kay found a decidedly better club exhibition, noting that the huge National Academy of Design–sized exhibitions of the American Watercolor Society had made "the upspringing of an Autumn show of water colors inevitable."[21] By 1893 de Kay was crowing over the quality to be found in the exhibition at the Fine Arts Society (home of his beloved Society of American Artists and the Art Students League): "[T]he little Water Color Club takes on the proportions of an art organization which has a certain future before it and has come to stay. Its former exhibitions have contained a good deal of useless material. This time there has been a sterner winnowing of the chaff, and the result is a collection decidedly above former averages."[22]

By the mid-1890s the New York Water Color Club had became the premier venue for watercolors and pastels, and like the Society of American Artists on which it had modeled itself, relentlessly pursued a degree of professionalism and inventiveness that put pressure on the older American Watercolor Society to reform along similar lines. In 1896 the *New York Times* reviewer noted of the exhibition of the older watercolor society, "The distinguishing characteristic . . . is one of much sobriety of tone. A majority of the pictures have been kept down in key, giving an agreeable feeling of reserve force and power that is always impressive."[23] In that same year the New York Water Color Club exhibition was described in the *Times* as "superior to any of the club's recent exhibitions. The collection numbers three hundred pictures in pastel and water colors, and includes fewer examples of eccentricity than marked the club's exhibition last year . . . as usual the landscape studies predominate."[24] Reference to "eccentricity" probably referred to the inclusion of fewer Impressionist watercolors.

Through the tough years of the depression of 1893–97 the club was relentless in limiting the number of works exhibited to a manageable group of the finest examples, a ruthless selectivity invariably praised by the critics. The year 1894 saw a marked jump in membership, a greater number of pastels and experimental works combining both mediums, and the inclusion of important groups of work by single artists, such as John La Farge's works from Japan and the South Seas, Maurice Prendergast's bold and freely handled watercolors, and Whistler's works on paper. In 1902, eighteen important watercolors by Winslow Homer were exhibited, a sure sign of the maturing status of the club. By 1901 the club's annual exhibition had such a distinctive look that a reviewer (possibly de Kay) for the *New York Times* could detect a peculiar national quality in the exhibited work. "If you have been in Europe recently and have seen a water color exhibition in London, a difference will be noted at once. Here our watercolorists, of the younger generation at least, have a tendency to soft tones, rich, low notes, harmonies, and tonality, while abroad the key is sharper and higher, more attention being paid to line. The story is more important in England, while here the artists are pursuing effects of atmosphere . . . And the result of this turn toward harmonious notes gives to the exhibition of the Water Color Club a charm which springs from the uniformity of the effort and results in a decorative principle, not, indeed, intentionally obtained, but the outcome of natural causes."[25] This distinctive quality, "a more than common sense of color," was noted by de Kay in his words about the 1903 annual exhibition: "The sympathy that many of these men and women show for tonal qualities in landscapes and marines can scarcely escape the attention of the most careless observer, so that what strikes one first of all while strolling about the galleries is an absence of the harsh and grating colors often found in miscellaneous collections of water colors and pastels."[26] The enthusiasm for the low-toned watercolor had spilled over into the longer-established American Watercolor Society, according to a *Brush and Pencil* reviewer in 1902, who called it a fad and an undesirable experiment. "One of these was an excessive partiality to low-toned color schemes, which, among certain workers in water-colors, has developed into something akin to a cult; and the other was a use of the medium for which the society stands pledged by its very name to be a representative in such a way as to suggest oils . . . This gloom of depressing tones and this lack of loyalty to the true spirit of water-colors could not fail to impress. . . ."[27]

The appearance of the "cult" of the low-toned watercolor could be pinpointed in large degree to Whistler, whose influence in America by 1900 was even greater than it had been in the early 1880s; his low-toned pastels and watercolors had been the bane of the English watercolor establishment for decades. In 1905, Whistler's countrymen in the New York Water Color Club held an exhibition in London, determined to show off that distinctive and "peculiar national quality." In 1904, Henry Snell, president of the New York Water Color Club since 1896, noted in an interview his intentions of promoting a London showing for American watercolors and pastels, "believing that the novel methods employed by our painters will interest British artists. 'I am certain that English critics and artists will be surprised at what we have accomplished in adding to the range of effects attainable by a medium whose limitations have heretofore been regarded as definitely fixed . . . We shall show them pictures that, without such evidence before them, they would believe it would be impossible to paint with water colors alone. American art amounts to a deal more than most Americans themselves appreciate. One object of our proposed exhibition is by eliciting the opinions of good judges here (in England) to awaken our own people to a recognition of the fact that we have progressed in some respects beyond the European schools, and have struck out for ourselves on distinctively American and original lines.'"[28] The novel methods Snell had in mind were on display the following year at the 1905 club exhibition in New York, when Charles de Kay praised Snell's Venetian watercolor (see fig. 5.38): "The method used is what might be called 'dry water color,' in which the pigments are not so much floated on as brushed on, and then manipulated in various ways, somewhat as a painter in oils charges and rubs the canvas. Delicate atmospheric effects are secured in this way."[29] Snell, who was English-born, and returned to England for regular visits and painting expeditions, was confident in what he and his colleagues had to offer the Europeans in terms of non-narrative, experimental, and atmospherically expressive watercolors and pastels, much in keeping with the experimental tradition of the great American expatriate Whistler. When Snell brought the New York Watercolor Club exhibition to London in the spring of 1905, the British critics were puzzled at what they found. In an artistic culture with a long tradition of watercolor, the British were accustomed not just to storytelling in their charming watercolors, but, as reported in *the New York Times*, exacting uses of the medium: "It is not what we should call a water-color exhibition, remark several critics, but that being said, the pictures are not without merit. From remarks in several leading papers one gathers that something different was expected from this quarter, notably a very hard, cold technique and an absence of sentiment and imagination."[30] The striving after special effects and innovatory approaches in the ranks of the Club was noted in a review by de Kay of the 1908 exhibition: "... a happy hunting ground for the lover of variety. Not only do we have twenty different methods of using the medium, from the 'washed drawing' through body color, 'scrub' transparent color, body color, and transparent color combined, stipple, water color with pastel worked over it, & etc., but we have a great variety of subjects and such inequality of merit as gives the impression of anything but narrow standards on the part of the jury."[31]

The innovative tradition embodied by the New York Water Color Club, especially along the lines of Whistlerian soft-edged, atmospheric, and expressive works in watercolor and pastel, provided a forum and encouragement for many American modernists like Twachtman and Prendergast, especially the late and perhaps finest watercolors of Arthur B. Davies—a tradition that in turn set the stage for later artists John Marin and Georgia O'Keeffe.

But the heyday of the Tonalist watercolor and the New York Water Color Club was fading by 1910. In part this had to do with the artists who began eschewing the watercolor medium, favoring traditional oils and the more remunerative market for larger works and increasingly expressive facture. The Tonalist watercolor had in many respects developed in response to the hard economic times of the late 1880s and 1890s, and the heady economy after 1900 made the watercolor less attractive to moneyed buyers. In 1922 the Water Color Club and the American Watercolor Society began holding joint exhibitions, and like the Society of American Artists and the National Academy of Design, the two watercolor groups were finally amalgamated in 1941 (again, the issue of jury exception for members proved the toughest stumbling block to be resolved). Nevertheless, the small-scale watercolors and pastels in the decades around the turn of the century—in the spirit of J. Frank Currier, Henry Muhrman, and John Henry Twachtman—may rightly be regarded as an arena in which many of the most groundbreaking developments in American art took place during those years. As will be seen, the summary freedom of expression at the heart of these smaller mediums, with Currier as the prime and original exponent, may well have had a salutary and dynamic effect on progressive developments in the more established oil format, especially among figure painters like William Merritt Chase, Thomas Dewing, and J. Alden Weir, who were equally adept at pastels, and who increasingly adopted the fluidity and play of the Tonalist watercolor to their landscape canvases in these years. In addition to influencing younger rising painters like Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman and Ben Foster cut their teeth on the charming small-scale decorative formats of the Aesthetic movement in the early 1880s. A greater familiarity with the Tonalist watercolor and pastel, in depth and breadth, will further elucidate the cross-pollination that took place between the various mediums.

The Tonalist Watercolor and Pastel

The development and flowering of the Tonalist watercolor (often in mixed-media works combining watercolor and pastel), which reached its height from around 1885 to 1905, paralleled developments in the oil medium. But given the intimacy, informality, simplicity, and inherent suggestiveness of watercolor, the medium provided many novel artistic resources—especially the ease of producing sketchy and atmospheric tonal effects—to which the thicker opaque oil medium was less well suited. If the Tonalist oil was democratic in its depiction of the quiddity of everyday experience, and its subject matter was of universal appeal, the Tonalist watercolor expanded the reach of these populist themes, while retaining the cachet of a genuinely fine-arts expression. The American Watercolor Society had always included in its exhibitions a large number of amateur artists even though it membership and executive committee was made up of professionals, a good number of whom were members of the National Academy of Design. In fact, the earliest exhibitions the American Watercolor Society were something of an adjunct to the National Academy, often displayed with the larger body and sharing a catalogue. Among the future Tonalists, Alexander Wyant and Robert Swain Gifford were early members. In the

1860s, the American Watercolor Society had some trouble filling its exhibitions since the status of the medium was held in low esteem by many of the major artists, who simply had no interest in watercolors.

By the late 1870s, this had all changed and the American Watercolor Society exhibitions grew in size to the point of unwieldiness as submissions poured in from professionals and amateurs alike. As has been seen, from 1878 on progressive artists like Currier, Muhrman, Twachtman, and Homer were stirring up major controversies in the art world with their watercolor submissions to the society. The medium's growing popularity had also made it an arena for innovation and change. Charles de Kay, recognizing watercolor's expressive potential, often promoted his progressive agenda for American art by touting the peculiar felicities of the medium, noting in 1879 of the Watercolor Society, "It is pleasant to read on the walls of the exhibition rooms in the frequent tickets marked sold the sign of an increased prosperity of the American Water Color Society and to hear from the attendants the report of a much larger number of visitors this season than ever before."[32] De Kay, in his early support of Currier, Muhrman, and Whistler, recognized their genius in exploiting the intimate charms, sketch-like freedom, and veiled ambiguities that works on paper provided the artist, which was why he urged Homer to explore the expressive resources initially displayed by Currier, further advising Wyant, and even Murphy to embrace the inherent freedoms of the watercolor medium, rather than using it simply to reproduce the look of their larger oils in a smaller, and cheaper, format.[33]

De Kay was an early exponent of the English watercolor tradition in its Whistlerian guise, which exploited the inherently expressive quality of colored washes, as opposed to the use of opaque gouache or body color; it was an artistic strategy that highlighted the suggestive tonal qualities of watercolor and downplayed the use of detail, and, the unfortunate Pre-Raphaelite penchant for insinuating a narrative into the picture. By 1880, the growing status of the watercolor was made clear by de Kay's breezy tone in a review: "The advantages of water-colors over oils are too patent to require to say anything further about them here, save that they require less time and expense than oils in the making, and less money and knowledge of art in the buying. Water-colors appeal to a far wider circle than oils—they are far more popular."[34] This nexus between radical art and popular appeal, especially for the legions of amateur artists who dabbled in watercolor and pastel, made the Tonalist work on paper an important harbinger and force for change, especially in terms of the Aesthetic movement and its numerous decorative offshoots. John La Farge's use of watercolor in the design of his stained-glass windows and his travel sketches attest to the practical functionality of the medium. The popularity of watercolor grew by leaps and bounds, and by the late 1880s, the exhibitions of the American Watercolor Society had become so large and overburdened with indifferent amateur work that the younger rising professionals like Hassam, Eaton, Ochtman, Snell, and Foster felt compelled to found the New York Water Color Club as a way of putting the watercolor artist on a more professional footing and promoting and sustaining the fine-art status of the medium, a move that de Kay heartily supported. Besides the Water Color Club, both the Lotos Club and Salmagundi Club exhibitions provided crucial support for the Tonalist watercolor, along with commercial galleries like Macbeth Gallery in New York and Doll & Richards in Boston, and a range of major institutions that encompassed the Boston Art Club, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

Although J. Frank Currier rarely exhibited after the 1880s, his pastels and watercolors were well known and highly regarded in artistic circles, and exerted a lasting influence. For freedom of expression, spontaneity, and gestural use of pigment, Currier, along with Whistler, Muhrman (by then resident in London but regularly exhibiting in America), and Twachtman remained the touchstones for Tonalist artists in watercolor, pastel, and etching. Because of their small-scale format and monochromatic palette, etchings, in particular, suited the Tonalist aesthetic exquisitely. Whistler's 1880–81 etchings of Venice became icons to printmakers on both sides of the Atlantic, firing a print revival that carried well into the 1920s (see p. 253). This veritable explosion of interest in etching, sometimes of near fetishistic enthusiasm, deepened and furthered the hold in the artistic imagination of the stark, haunting, and ambiguous monochromatic forms of which Whistler was the master. Much of what we now recognize as modernist developments in art—free and expressive use of pigment, formal abstraction, the conceptual manipulation of medium for delicate nuances of expression, and a non-narrative approach to subject—often with Symbolist intimations—all evolved out of the tradition of the Tonalist watercolor and related mediums, especially in the hands of its greatest exponents, artists like Whistler, Currier, Twachtman, Muhrman, La Farge, Prendergast, and Arthur B. Davies, who in turn influenced modernist American artists such as John Marin, Arthur Dove, and Milton Avery. Given the critical role of the Tonalist watercolor in American art, a review of some of its finest—and long neglected—exponents will give an idea of the diversity of accomplishments in the period from 1880 to 1910 and beyond.

John La Farge (1835–1910)

No discussion of the Tonalist watercolor can fail to include the watercolors of John La Farge, whose work in the medium in terms of virtuosity, sheer quantity, and technical variety is on a

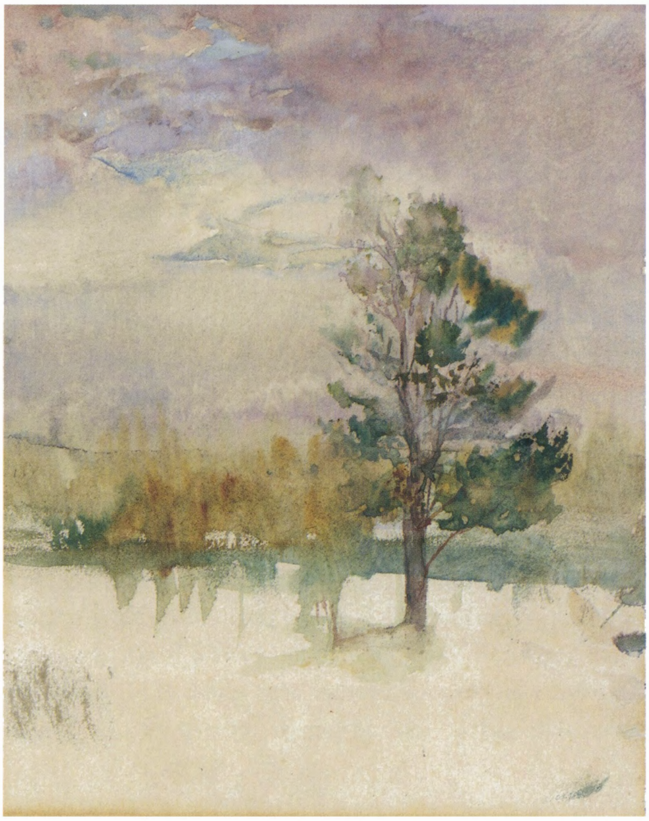


Fig. 5.13. John La Farge, *Winter Evening Sky*, c. 1878. Watercolor, 10¾ x 9 in. Courtesy William Vareika Fine Arts.

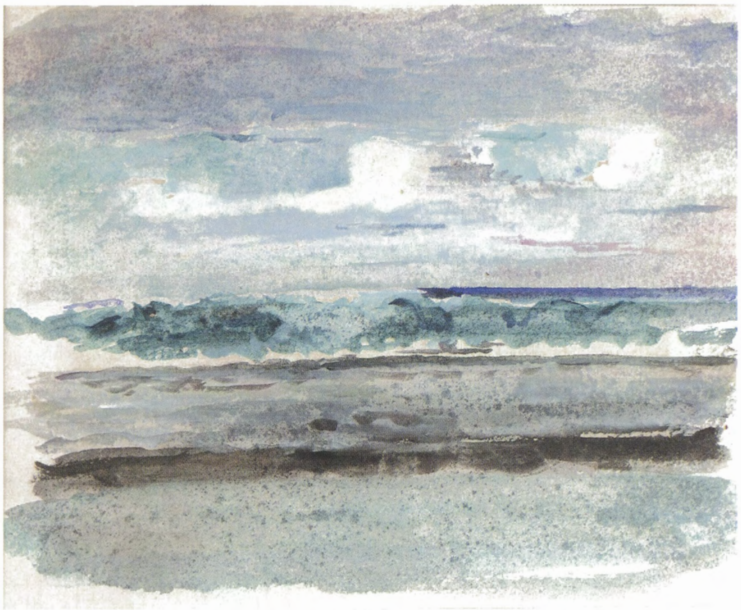


Fig. 5.14. John La Farge, *Study of Surf, Breaking on Outside Reef, Tautira, Tahiti*, c. 1891. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 10½ x 13¾ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

par with the work of Winslow Homer. La Farge came to watercolor almost by default since he was so badly frustrated by poor sales of his pathbreaking oils in the 1860s and early 1870s. He was thoroughly familiar with the medium from his earliest student days and even produced a few very fine watercolor landscape studies at Newport in the mid-1860s, that display all the hallmarks of the English tradition: thin washes of pigment over graphite outlines with the white of the paper left bare to provide highlights. But it was not until 1874 when he left his family in Newport to spend most of his time in New York, increasingly consumed with murals and his stained-glass business, that his watercolor production began in earnest. In 1879 he submitted still lifes, landscapes, and a figure piece to the American Watercolor Society exhibition; these were sumptuous in execution, with layered tonal washes that approximated the opalescent effects he was achieving in his stained glass. Not only did his watercolors begin to sell but the critics also showered him with praise. *Winter Evening Sky*, circa 1878 (fig. 5.13), is a perfect example of La Farge's work at the forefront of the Tonalist watercolor movement and employs free washes of diaphanous color to create effects of expressive spontaneity and ravishing passages of ambiguous form verging on pure abstraction. Throughout, a dexterous use of wet-into-wet pigment, run-ons of blurred colors, and the merest hint of details convey the feeling of a winter world alive with movement and the unseen, intimating those presences that so captivated Inness's generation of artists. The graphic read of the hazy tonal envelope vies with the delightful two-dimensional surface patterns, while providing the illusion of recession into space: a dramatic rendering, decorative and representational, derived both from Japanese sources and Whistlerian aestheticism.

La Farge's nuanced still lifes and landscapes of the late 1870s and early 1880s, especially the artist's landscapes from around 1883, often hark back to his early oils and watercolors of Newport in the 1860s, evocative of the misted light and airy color that made Newport a touchstone for his art, even as he later traveled to Japan and the South Seas. By the 1890s, at the height of the Tonalist watercolor movement in America, La Farge was able to move effortlessly from picturesque renderings of his trips to the Pacific to works of near pure abstraction. *Study of Surf, Breaking on Outside Reef, Tautira, Tahiti*, circa 1891 (fig. 5.14), demonstrates La Farge's extraordinary tactile and expressive handling of the medium, with transparent and opaque washes laid in to capture evanescent effects of light on clouds and sea. Like Whistler, both the texture and tone of the paper adds to the overall unity of effect. The supple horizontal patterns of sea, shore, and clouds are woven together like an aquamarine tapestry, creating tantalizing medleys of form and vibrant color transitions, reminiscent of Fairfield Porter's watercolors, and even the floating deliquescent planes of Mark Rothko's paintings. La Farge's artistic and financial success in the 1880s with his intimate, sketch-like and exquisitely expressive tonal watercolors is another indication of the growing commercial viability of the medium in these years as American artists of all backgrounds developed work along similarly progressive lines, while many of the technical resources of the medium resulted in a more expressive use of facture in oils.

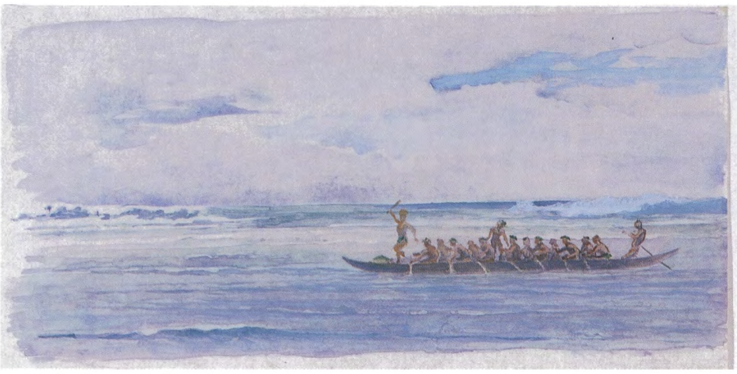


Fig. 5.15. John La Farge, *Canoe Going Up the Coast to Apia-Samoa*, 1891. Watercolor and gouache on paper, 5½ x 11½ in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

La Farge's trips to Japan in 1886 and the South Seas in 1890–91, to which he traveled with his friend the historian Henry Adams, produced some of his most fascinating and important work, including sketches, art notes, writings, letters, and collections of artifacts and photographs, on which the artist drew for the remainder of his life. These so-called "travel sketches" were turned into exhibition pieces that brought dizzying prices. *Canoe Going up the Coast to Apia-Samoa*, circa 1891 (fig. 5.15), displays La Farge's ability to take a realistic, even anthropologically accurate rendering, and endow it with a scintillating approximation of place and atmospheric conditions. In addition, the echoing and enchanting decorative patterns of horizontal waves and clouds provide an integrated backdrop for the long shape of the native canoe, transforming the picturesque into a spellbinding abstraction of interlaced color and form. By the time La Farge returned from his round-the-world trip with Adams in late 1891, there was a virtual craze for his travel sketches. In 1891 his Japanese watercolors, sold through his Boston dealer Doll & Richards, netted the artist $5,000; in 1893 an exhibition at Doll & Richards brought him a total of $7,000—enormous figures for the day, especially in light of the financial panic of 1893, to which wealthy Boston art patrons seemed immune. Major Boston collectors like Henry Lee Higginson spent prodigious sums on La Farge's watercolors, paying $25,000 for groups of his South Seas subjects.

The commercialization of La Farge's watercolor output has made it difficult, in retrospect, to firmly grasp the works' masterful artistry, since La Farge often copied from himself and produced hundreds if not thousands of studies and working sketches for his travel writings, in addition to mechanical sketches for his decorative designs and windows. La Farge's ability to exploit his work in a commercial setting, whether at Doll & Richards in Boston or at the Durand-Ruel Galleries in New York, further demonstrates the growing importance of galleries and the consequent diminishment of the established exhibiting institutions in terms of the artists' financial success. In the elaborate catalogue for his 1895 Durand-Ruel show, La Farge noted his intent, appealing to the discriminating connoisseurship of his prominent buyers. "I made these drawings and paintings with more or less attention to some special point; either tone or local color, or drawing of form or of motion. It would please me if my studies were looked at, as they were by my good friends called savages. Very much as cultivated painters might, they looked at my pictures in the way best suited to help the illusion—sometimes from near, sometimes from very far, in strong light or in shadow; in whatever way they thought the special case required."[35] La Farge's preface in his instructive catalogue, which additionally provided a kind of travelogue for the works on view, coaches his patrons in the aesthetics of the Tonalist movement, much along Whistler's lines, and underlines his aesthetic raison d'être: capturing the fleeting moments of light and color. Some of La Farge's finest work found its way into New York Water Color Club exhibitions, beginning soon after its founding, first in 1894, then in 1897 when a large group of La Farge's South Seas watercolors was exhibited. By 1898, La Farge was on the Club's jury and in 1900 another large group of his South Sea watercolors was on view and garnered rave reviews.

Alexander Wyant (1836–92)

Of the three major first-generation Tonalists—George Inness, Homer Dodge Martin, and Alexander Wyant—only Wyant maintained a continuing and avid interest in watercolor. Wyant was an early member of the American Watercolor Society and a founding member of the New York Water Color Club, though his early death in 1892 prevented him from realizing the growing commercial success of the club's exhibitions. As he made the transition from his early Hudson River style to Tonalism, Wyant embraced the breezy atmospherics of the Tonalist watercolor, often prompted by Charles de Kay. In an inimitable lecturing review of the American Watercolor Society's annual exhibition of 1879, with the line, "Manner and Mannerism... Can Water Run Up Hill?" de Kay excoriated watercolorists whose fixed mannerisms disallowed individual expression or variety, "... the formula has become so strong that no room is left for freshness and the individual grace of nature." The review rails against artists who churn out commercial work,[36] but praises Wyant for his "very pretty gift at watercolor painting," and the expansiveness of his vision. "A gentle and pensive mood is Mr. Wyant's, not interfered with by considerations of outside matters, but wholly given over to the reproduction of the scene as it appears in his own eyes.... According to his own lights, he has put something of himself into these quiet skies and landscapes, instead of finishing off one superficially, only to plunge with more haste than discretion at another."[37] In *Pastureland*, circa 1880–90 (fig. 5.16), Wyant has certainly complied with de Kay's admonition to "put something of himself" in the scene, transforming this

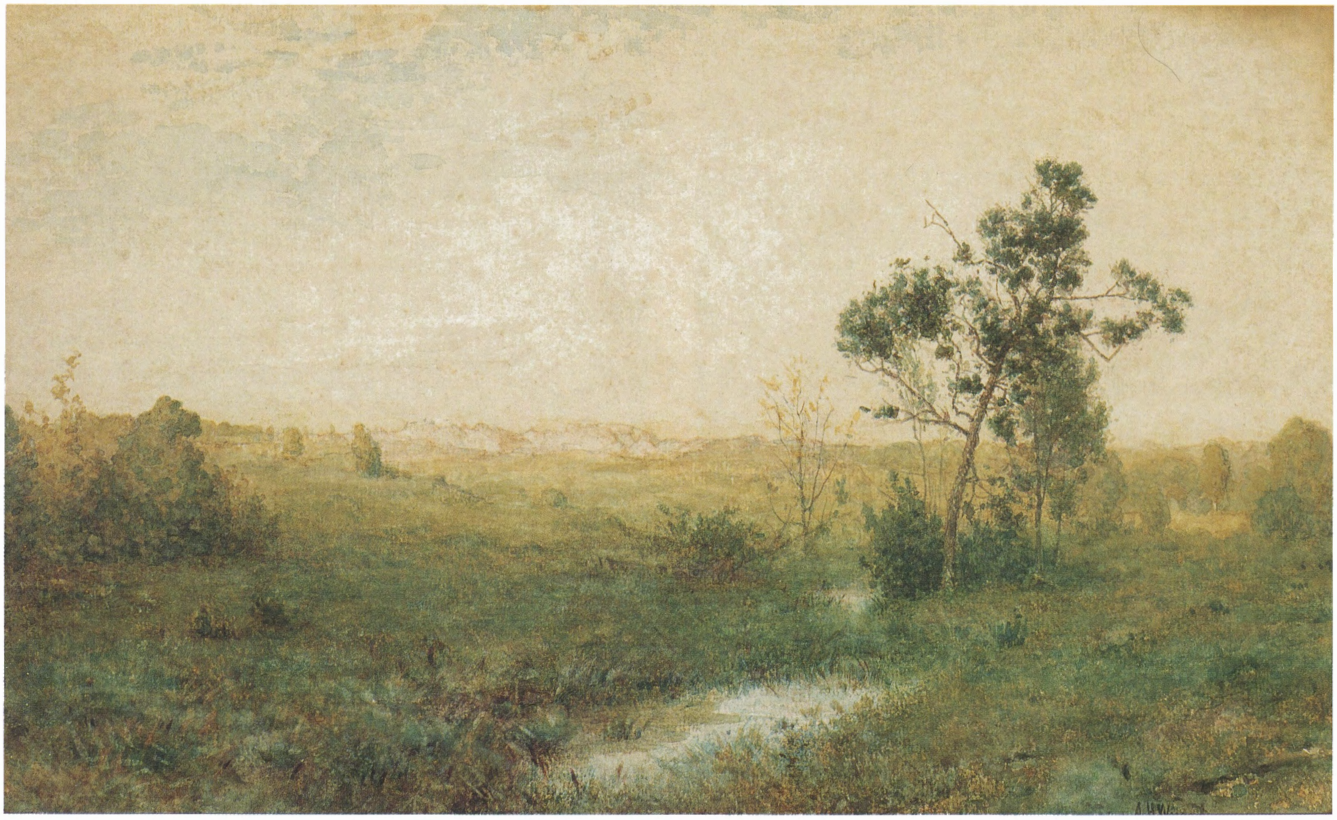


Fig. 5.16. Alexander Wyant, *Pastureland*, c. 1880-90. Watercolor, 12¼ x 20¼ in. Anonymous collection.

pastoral world with a lyricism of line and form—and a certain nostalgia for a fading rural world—giving the watercolor a serenity of mood that feeds the imagination. A later work, *A Grey Day*, circa 1890 (fig. 5.17), fulfills de Kay's hopes for the Emersonian ideal, "the individual grace of nature," while demonstrating how completely Wyant has absorbed the progressive resources of the English watercolor tradition, combining freely washed colors with expressive handling. The work seems to emerge out of the toned paper, a creation of the barest wisps of light blue washes with only deft calligraphic notes for the foreground reeds. Wyant has used scraping and lifting techniques to expose the reserve of the paper, creating subtle and shimmering highlights—gleams and glints of obscure sunlight reflecting off water and the damp earth. Only the merest touch of crimson in the tiny figure breaks and relieves the expanses of shimmering blue-gray. Wyant has achieved a symphony of effects, all produced with the sparest of means, a perfect coda to the artist's transition from detailed Hudson River panoramas to the intimate and deeply expressive poetry of his late years.

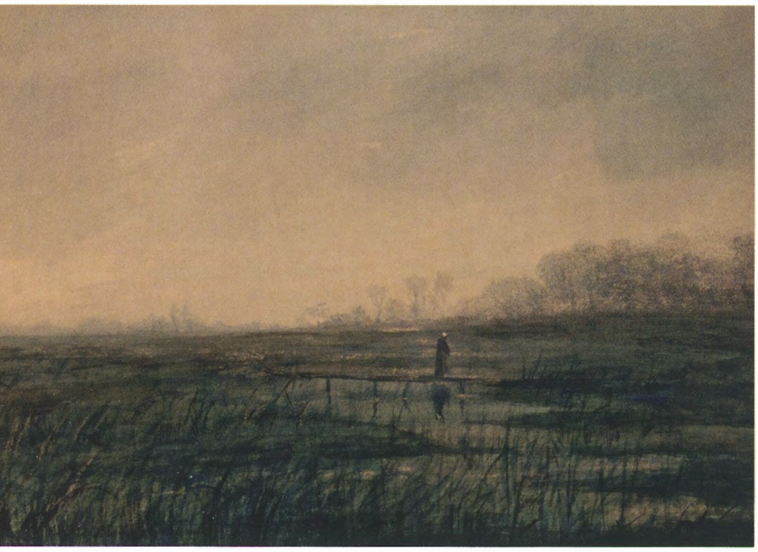


Fig. 5.17. Alexander Wyant, *A Grey Day*, c. 1890. Watercolor, 10 x 12 in. Private collection.

Homer Dodge Martin (1836–97)

Homer Dodge Martin is not usually thought of as a major watercolorist, although his early work as a draftsman in the Hudson River School style is very fine and much sought after. Practically unknown are his watercolors from his years working in Normandy, France, where he produced some of his finest oils along the rugged coastline. *Etaples Harbor—France*, 1885 (fig. 5.18), is a rare example of Martin's French watercolors, showing the harbor of Etaples nearby his home in Villerville. It offers a fascinating glimpse of an artist trained in traditional modes of seeing, flexing his perceptual muscle to encompass new visual formats. Martin uses a high angle of attack to flatten his foreground shapes, including the tree and path in the middle ground, while allowing the light reflected off the harbor

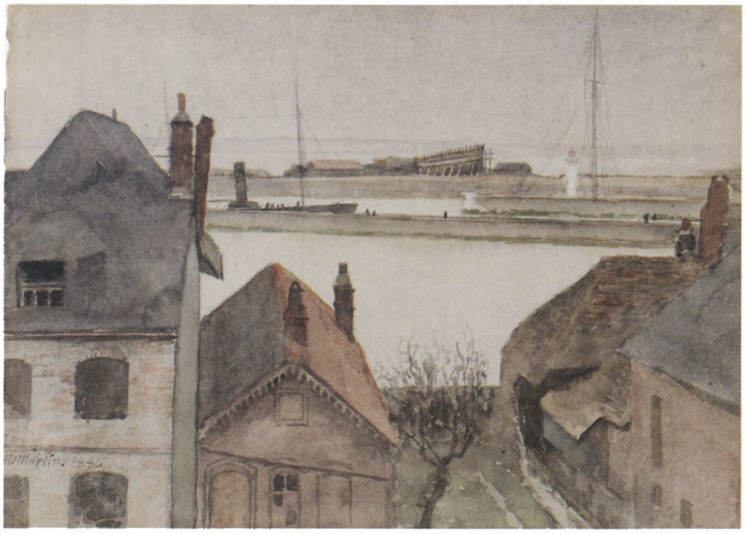


Fig. 5.18. Homer Dodge Martin, *Etaples Harbor—France*, 1885. Watercolor, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

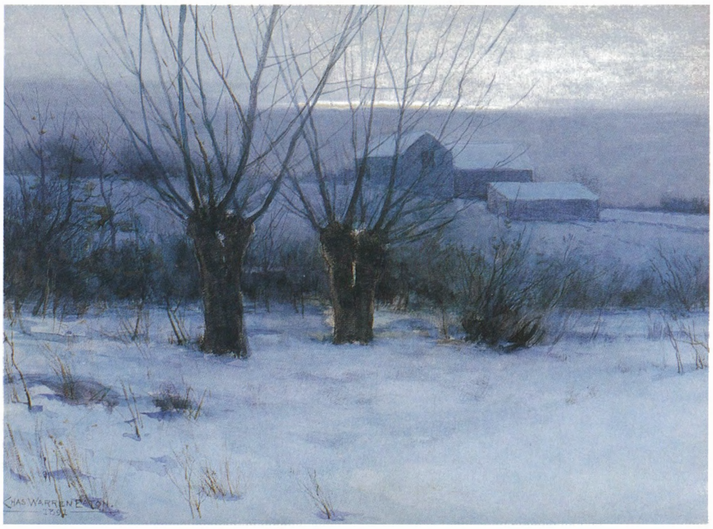


Fig. 5.19. Charles Warren Eaton, *Winter Orchard*, 1891. Watercolor, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

to expand the perspective outward, creating a dynamic counter flow of energy between the flat plain of the paper and the illusion of distance. The artist's deft use of watercolor washes and minimalist jottings to summarize the subject is masterful. The areas of water and sky, which create an eerie sense of dull gray light, are simply the raw ground of the paper left exposed. The method gives the scene an intimate quality and a compelling unity in which the enveloping atmosphere seems to suffuse everything. Martin and his wife were in severe financial straits during these years and it may well be that his production of watercolors provided a badly needed source of income. In a letter to his close friend and *Scribner's Magazine* editor, William Crary Brownell, Martin mentioned the growing appreciation for his French watercolors in London. "I have gotten the habit of making watercolors while prospecting for subjects which I would want to do in oil. Hennessy [artist and illustrator who lived nearby] says with rather a sadly suggestive emphasis that I seem to have a natural or decided or something or other facility for watercolor—anyway, he sold them for me in London."[38] *Etaples Harbor— France* was in the collection of Arthur B. Davies, and suggests that Martin's watercolors may have earned high praise in progressive circles on both sides of the Atlantic.

Charles Warren Eaton (1857–1937)

Among the second-generation indigenous Tonalists, who began their careers in the 1880s, Charles Warren Eaton stands out as one of the best—perhaps the best in the sheer range of his artistry—and certainly the most prolific of the watercolorists of the era. The evolution of his work over thirty or so years clearly demonstrates the modernist direction the medium took in these decades. Eaton was a co-founder and first treasurer of the New York Water Color Club and astutely anticipated the popularity and sales potential for the Tonalist watercolor. His prolific output of watercolors and pastels found their way into exhibitions across the country and in Europe. Eaton admired J. Frank Currier's work and occasionally approached the gestural freedom expressed in the most daring works of the older artist. With a directness and quiet gracefulness, Eaton found a rare and telling beauty in the most ordinary. De Kay invariably wrote admiringly of Eaton's poetic minimalism in his reviews. *Winter Orchard*, 1891 (fig. 5.19), demonstrates Eaton's early proficiency at creating broad areas of measured tonality in watercolor out of which fine wispy details of plant life emerge like lace filaments. Winter scenes were especially popular subjects in the 1880s because of their inherent potential for displaying an overall quiet tonality and the serene overtones admired by buyers and critics. *Winter Orchard* retains a freshness and plain-spoken quality of expression, within which Eaton has worked in passages of sophisticated harmonic modulations of tone, as in the rectangular roofs of the farm buildings reflecting

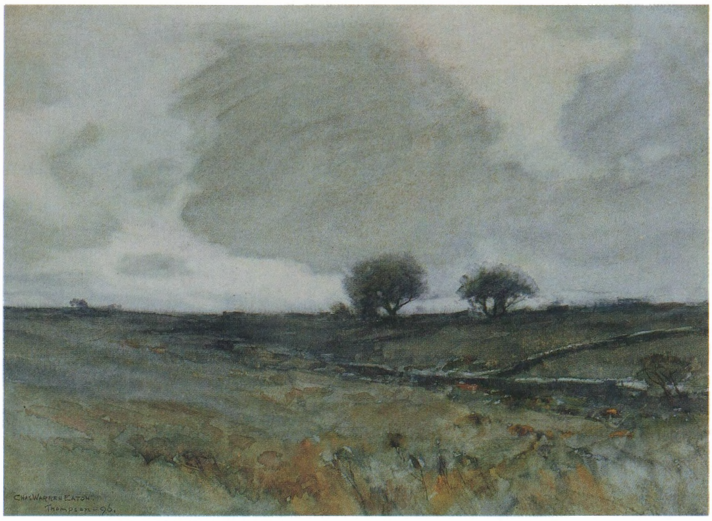


Fig. 5.20. Charles Warren Eaton, *Pasture Trees*, 1896. Watercolor, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

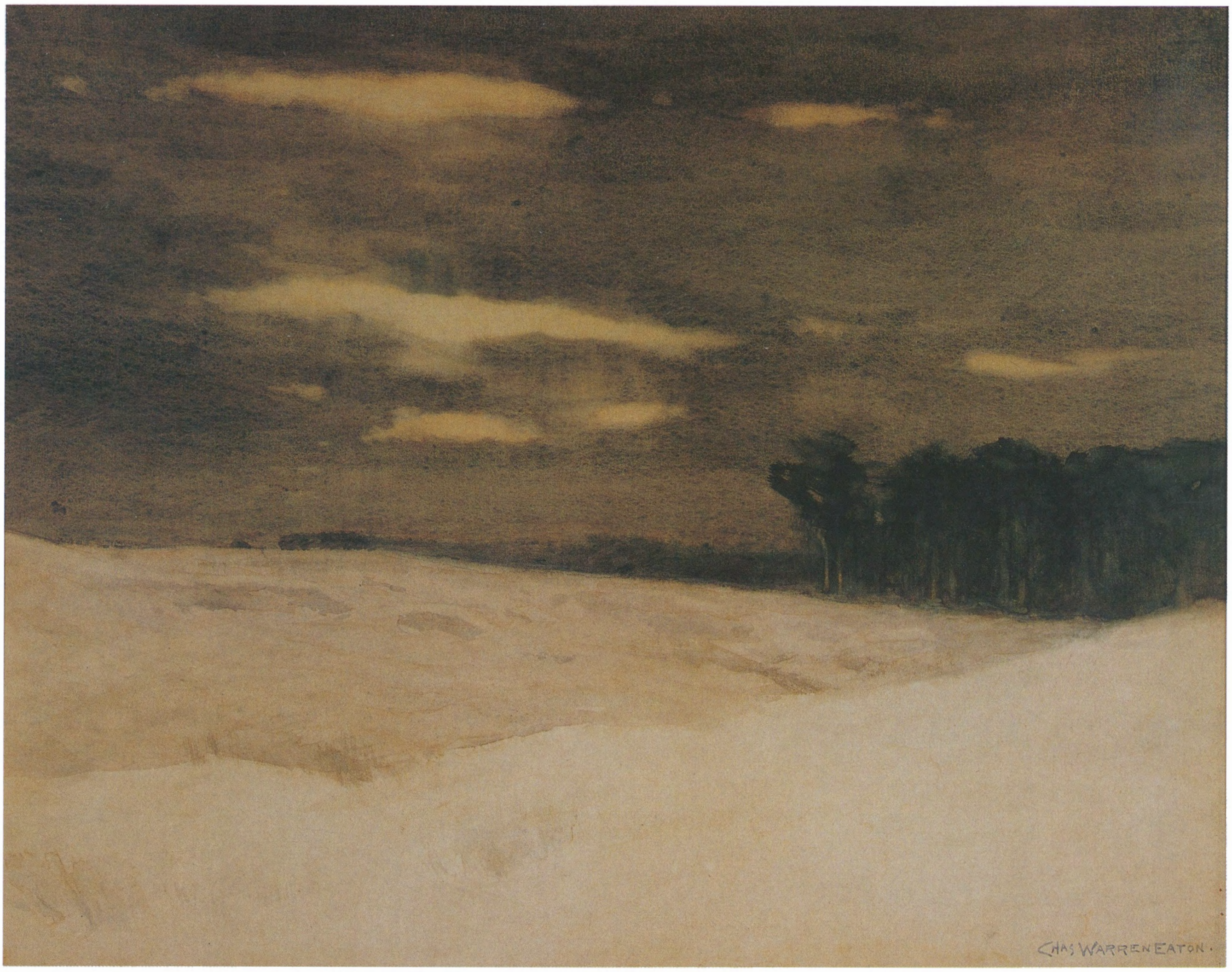

CHAS WARREN EATON.

Fig. 5.21. Charles Warren Eaton, *Snow Slopes*, c. 1900. Watercolor, 15 x 19 in. Private collection.

the similar tones of the sky, and the crease of opaque white and lemon yellow above the horizon, a fleeing glimmer of light touching the pale clouds against a paler sky. Such a work is saved from overt sweetness by the subtle variations of tone, which challenge the eye to decipher winter's chilly charms. Like many in his generation of core Tonalists, Eaton evolved from the plainspoken to a more complex and synthetic mode of expression. This change was noted in a *New York Times* review of Eaton's watercolors in 1896. "Admirers of Mr. Charles Warren Eaton during the last ten years will experience something of a surprise at the new turn his talent has taken, for among the eight examples of his work shown, there is little to recall his old method. His art shows a subtler vein than it has heretofore revealed, and his color greater refinement."[39]

Pasture Trees, 1896 (fig. 5.20), displays Eaton's new subtlety; the work indulges the medium with thin washes laid in deftly and quickly with only the meanest hints of linear or other detailing. Traditional points of focus and passages of interest are merged into an organic whole, in which every element is integrated into the tonal structure. The viewer's pleasure is no longer as dependent, as it was in the early work, on itemizing the detailed beauties of the component parts. In *Pasture Trees*, it is the whole that registers at first glance, the broad forms and the interaction of tonal masses. The looming dark cloud further dramatizes the scene, though not so much a warning of inclement weather as a striking pattern of light and dark, the negative and positive grays having the tenor of symbolic utterance—of melancholy and uncertainty. Such broad and striking decorative patterns in masses of sky had already been popularized by Albert Pinkham Ryder, while Ralph Albert Blakelock had managed similar landscape dramas with his brooding spiritualizing moonlights. Nearing the century's end, such expressions of melancholy and autumnal doubt filled the Tonalist canon, often finding its most striking manifestations in the watercolor medium.

Eaton's *Snow Slopes*, circa 1900 (fig. 5.21), captures the fin-de-siècle anxiety in a bravura display of freely applied blurred washes, and blottings and rivulets of unabsorbed color, a work as astonishing for its simplicity of design and formal textural complexity as the stark cadences of winter's gloom.

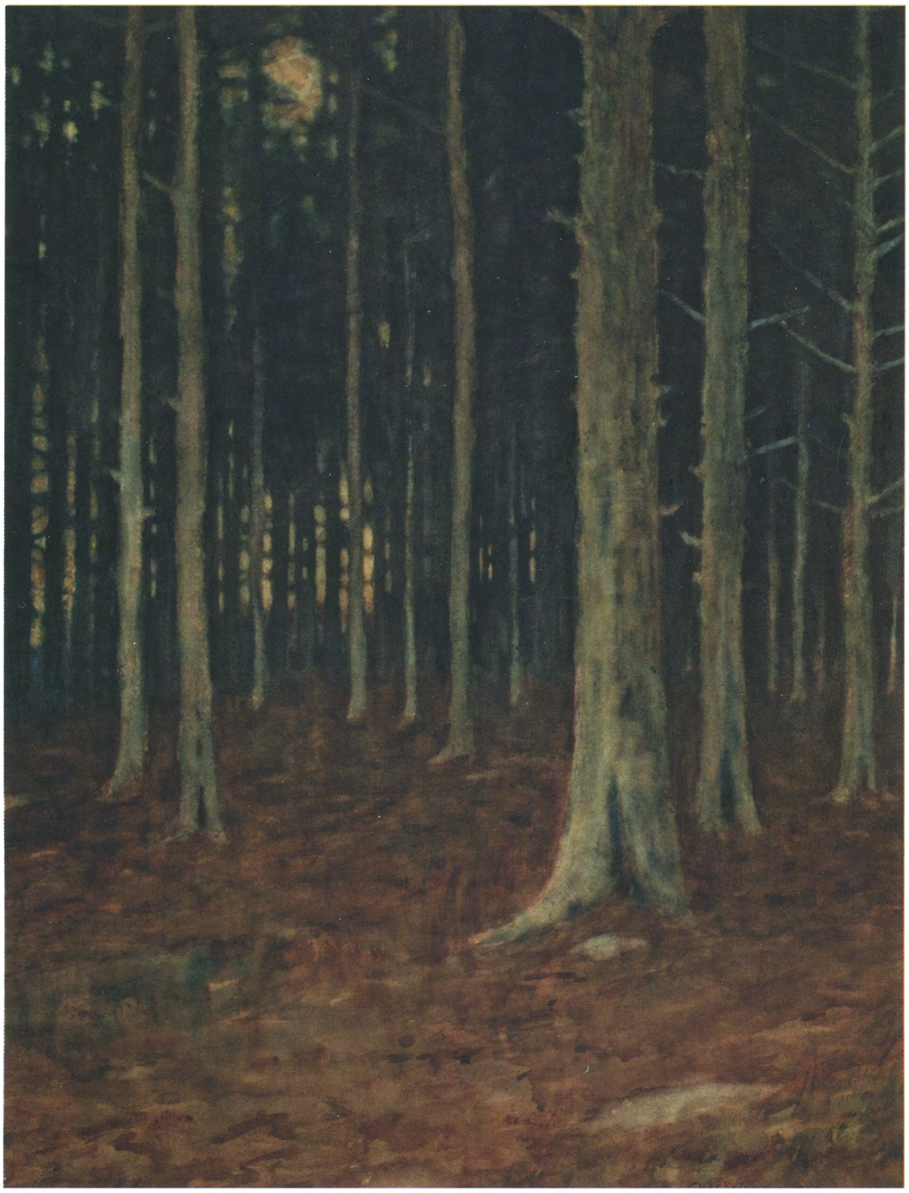


Fig. 5.22. Charles Warren Eaton, *Pines*, c. 1905. Watercolor, 22 x 28 in. Private collection.

The rhythm of the brushwork displays the masterfulness of Chinese calligraphy. The compression and cropping of the image, certainly influenced by Japanese woodblock prints, thrusts the brushwork and the ravishing patterns of yellow seepage through the masses of gray onto the picture plane—floating collage-like areas of expressive paint handling, so that the raw emotion of the artist is starkly revealed, mirroring the more realistic depiction of an oppressive winter twilight. Eaton's use of expansive areas of gouache (not for detail but to create broad masses of form) is very much in keeping with the experimental attitudes of his New York Water Club colleagues of the time. In the simple hovering planes of color, Eaton, like Currier, anticipates the visualized emotion of Mark Rothko's dematerialized landscape visions—a half-century later.

An extraordinary watercolor, *Pines*, circa 1905 (fig. 5.22), demonstrates not just Eaton's total mastery of the medium but also his feeling for expressive symbolization that puts him on a par with European Symbolists of the period. Eaton traveled to Europe regularly in the years before World War I and was well acquainted with international stylistic developments. His fascination with the white pine in his Connecticut summer home culminates in this otherworldly moonlit image, large in size for a watercolor and dramatic and haunting in carrying power, alive with compressed vibration of blue, purple, and green tones. It is very much in conceert with the preoccupations of the budding international avant-garde—painters like Gustav Klimt—and his own compatriot, the painter and photographer Edward Steichen, who created Tonalist forest interiors that exploited in particular the long sinuous trunks of pines to create dreamlike feelings of entrapment and wonder. The suggestive play of negative and positive space, as well as the tantalizing decorative shapes created by the grid of vertical and horizontal forms, only adds to the dizzying complexity and lush ambiguity of this avatar of American modernism. Much of

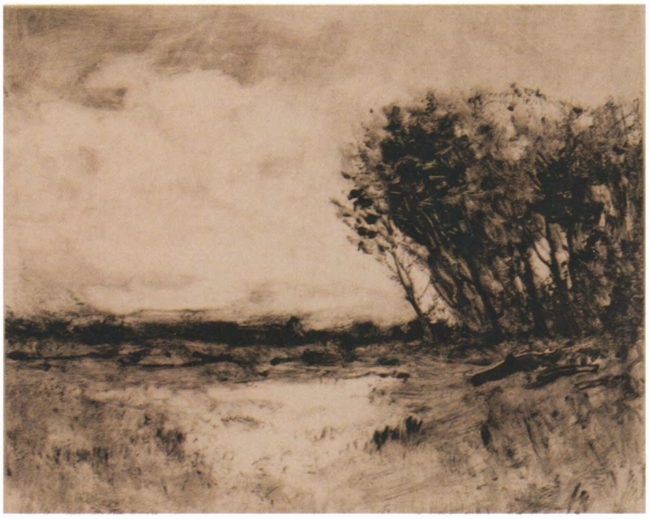


Fig. 5.23. Charles Warren Eaton, *Autumn Breeze*, c. 1890s. Monotype on paper, 8 x 9½ in. Private collection.

the formal complexity found in the work of later artists Georgia O'Keeffe, Oscar Bluemner, Barnett Newman, and Wolf Kahn are prefigured in Eaton's stark and symbolic renderings created between 1900 and 1910.

A monotype by Eaton, *Autumn Breeze*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.23), is yet another demonstration of the artist's facility working in this somewhat—for the period—experimental monochromatic medium. Eaton has indulged the most expressive aspects of the print medium: plate tone, selective wipings, and a jittery gestural use of ink that, through the pressure of the printing process, sometimes approximates the look of finger paints. Eaton achieves an extraordinary merging of means and ends, whereby the ink textures and activated marks describe a tactile correspondence mirroring the actual feeling of a breezy autumnal afternoon. Out of bare-bones black and white emerge a sensation of color and movement—life and breath. Eaton's monotypes are another example of the populist nature of Tonalist art—inexpensive artworks for economic hard times in the 1890s, that acted to promote a more progressive aesthetic agenda to the wider buying public.

Ben Foster (1852–1926)

Ben Foster, along with Charles Warren Eaton, was one of the founders (an early member of the executive committee) of the New York Water Color Club. Though not a prolific watercolorist, he was able to turn his broadly brushed style to the wash medium and produce similar effects derived from his use of oil paint: rich and somber color, large landscape forms, and a mood evocative of haunting mystery. *A Dim Old Forest*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.24), shows Foster managing a near-claustrophobic intimacy spun out of whirlpools of powerfully flowing, if muted tonalities. Already he has adopted the major innovations that were revolutionizing the watercolor medium in the 1890s. The apertures of hazy light emerging from the gloom of the white pine boughs become the central focus of the composition, both illuminating their surroundings and becoming negative forms patterning the eerie forest depths. The dark foreground rises toward the viewer like an earthen wave, merging with the massive trunk of the pine and its backdrop as if to suck out light and air. With sparse but looming imagery, Foster has captured the sensation of aged nature overwhelming the tentative—and transitory—presence of the human observer, a quiet yet implacable force. *A Dim Old Forest* has the emotional resonance of reverie in solitude, like the ecstatic states of mind that, as Thoreau wrote, bear best fruit in seasons of calm: "... when our talent is active, the memory of those rarer moods comes to color our picture and is the permanent paint-pot, as it were, into which we dip our brush."[40]

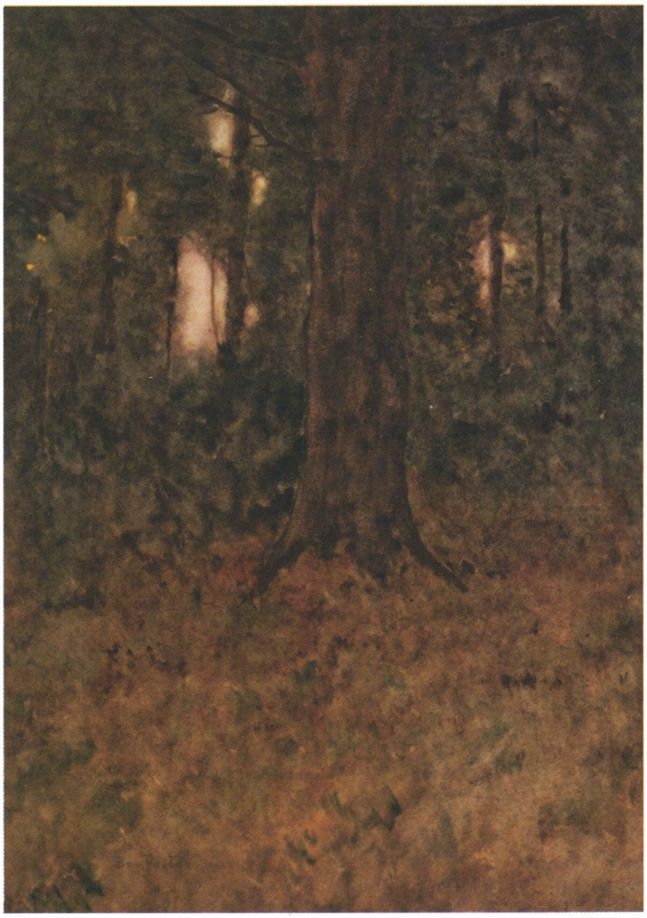


Fig. 5.24. Ben Foster, *A Dim Old Forest*, c. 1890s. Watercolor, 10 x 15 in. Private collection.

Leonard Ochtman (1854–1934)

Another early founder of the New York Water Color Club, Leonard Ochtman, proved himself a watercolorist of extraordinary delicacy and subtle richness. *Riverside, Connecticut in Winter*, 1894 (fig. 5.25), originally titled *In the Hills of Connecticut*, was lovingly described by de Kay in a review of

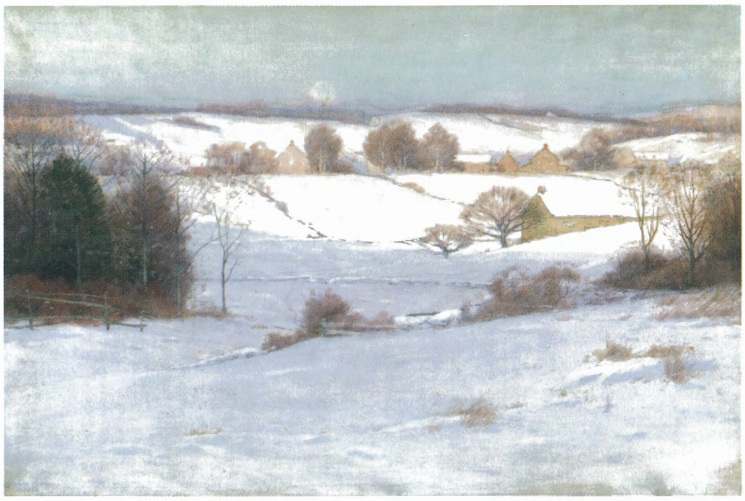


Fig. 5.25. Leonard Ochtman, *Riverside, Connecticut in Winter*, 1894. Watercolor, 24 x 36 in. Collection of Tom Gorin.

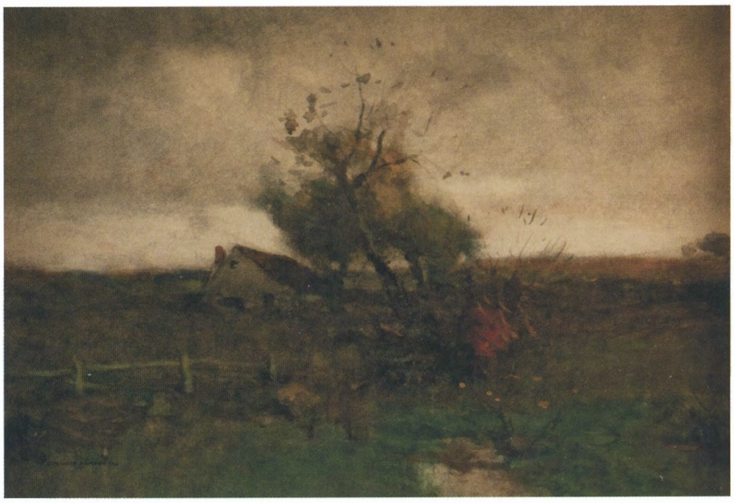


Fig. 5.26. J. Francis Murphy, *Arkville Farm*, 1895. Watercolor, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

the 1894 annual American Watercolor Society exhibition. "Mr. Leonard Ochtman sends a large snowy landscape . . . which is a masterpiece. The foreground in shadow is very pale blue. Masses of wintry trees and coppices frame the composition to right and left. The better part of a big barn shows from behind a snowy swale in the middle distance, while further back up the hill are farmhouses and wayside trees that indicate the road which runs across the scene. Above and beyond are uplands crowned with wedges or woodland against a fine gray sky." This formalist description elucidates aspects of de Kay's aesthetic criteria: fine tonal forms designed to lead the eye in a sensuous—sensation-filled—path around the artwork. De Kay was so taken with Ochtman's watercolor that he ended his review with a complaint that the Evans Prize for watercolor, which had been given to J. Francis Murphy, should have gone to Ochtman. "How the jury could have passed by Ochtman's snowy landscape for this is one of those problems that prize awards rarely fail to propound."[41] Unlike those of many of his Tonalist contemporaries, Ochtman's skills as a watercolorist, exquisite as they were, remained in a relatively traditional and narrow vein and did not develop further along the expressive lines of Charles Warren Eaton or J. Francis Murphy.

J. Francis Murphy (1853–1921)

While he was not a stalwart of the New York Water Color Club, J. Francis Murphy was a prolific watercolorist until an improving art market in the late 1890s caused him to give up the medium. *Arkville Farm*, 1898 (fig. 5.26), displays Murphy's synthesizing force, his ability to compact a small image into a powerful expression. Fences, farmhouse, and gnarled apple trees are created with extraordinary suggestive power and only minimal description. The wet-into-wet pigment application, with only the briefest accents of opaque color, demonstrate Murphy's mastery of the medium, especially manifest in the imagistic carrying power of a very limited range of tones. As in all of Murphy's art, the scene is probably a composite creation, drawn from the imagination and memory, but a memory informed by an eye honed on diligent sketching over years in the artist's Arkville, New York, hermitage. Even the more conventional watercolors, classic renditions of Murphy's middle-period style, like *Romantic Landscape*, 1898 (fig. 5.27), display the full gamut of dexterous sensibility and pastoral charm that must have made them appealing in the difficult market of the 1890s. Notwithstanding his Evans Prize win in 1894, Murphy gave up watercolor in 1898, claiming the medium was "too messy," but more likely, as the boom for Tonalist landscapes began to pick up toward the turn of the century, the artist preferred to concentrate on more profitable oils. It is likely that the freer expressive quality of Murphy's late watercolor style influenced, or at the very least found more fertile outlets, in the artist's easel painting after 1900.

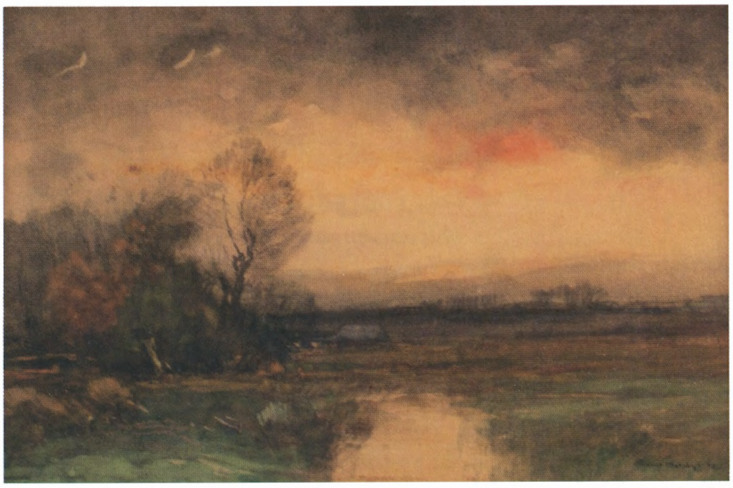


Fig. 5.27. J. Francis Murphy, *Romantic Landscape*, 1898. Watercolor, 7 x 10 in. Private collection.

William Lathrop (1859–1938)

William Lathrop, who by the turn of the century would become dean of the Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Tonalists, first made his mark in the New York art world—and revived a faltering career—when he won the Evans Prize at the 1896 American Watercolor Society annual exhibition. *Trees on a Hillside*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.28), shows Lathrop's deft handling of the medium and bold graphic power—the result of years of sketching and making black-and-white lithographs. The free washes of color on the hillside contrast with the stark trunks of the trees, while the dazzling calligraphy of the split-rail fence in the sunlight adds a snappy fillip of detail. Lathrop was a friend of Ochtman and J. Alden Weir and *Trees on a Hillside* may well have been inspired by a stay at Weir's farm. *Hillside Patterns*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.29), again demonstrates Lathrop's ability to combine naturalism with eye-catching decorative design, but here executed with broader and more expressive laying in of contiguous tones. The *New York Times* review of Lathrop's six prizewinning watercolors of 1896 noted that the artist "has invested them with his own poetic fancy; he has gone far beyond the surface." And in a second review, the *Times* pointed out the artist's "very serious qualities" of these quintessential Tonalist glimpses of nature. "There is keen observation and delightful rendering of a most subtle effect not immediately apparent . . . a fine appreciation of the delicacy of late afternoon, with all the harmonies of the hour."[42] Like the work of so many artists of his generation, Lathrop's early, relatively tight renderings of landscape before 1900 would give way to a much broader and expressionistic style of brushwork in his late production.

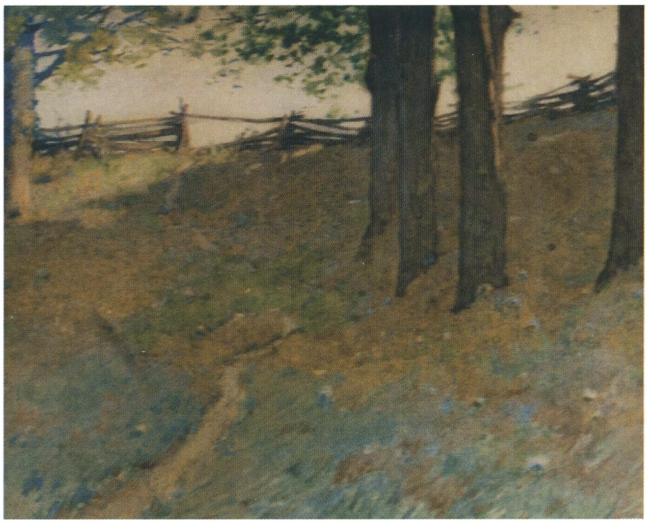


Fig. 5.28. William Lathrop, *Trees on a Hillside*, c. 1890s. Watercolor, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

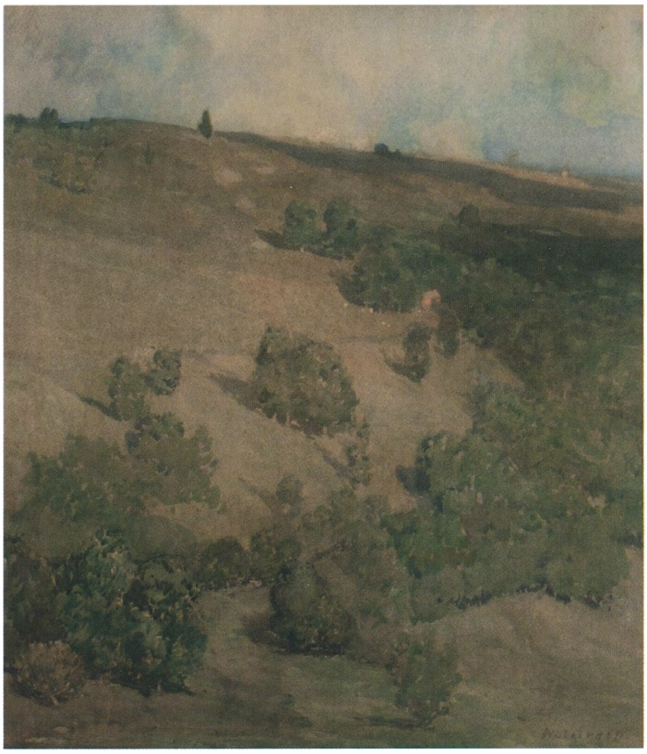


Fig. 5.29. William Lathrop, *Hillside Patterns*, c. 1890s. Watercolor, 16 x 14 in. Private collection.

Charles Harry Eaton (1850–1901)

Charles Harry Eaton, though obscure today, was one of the finest artists among the Tonalists and an outstanding watercolorist. A distant cousin of Charles Warren Eaton, the two artists—the Eatons, as sometimes referred to them in exhibitions—were compelled to incorporate their middle names into their signatures to differentiate themselves from one another in early exhibitions. Charles Harry Eaton was secretary of the American Watercolor Society at his untimely death at fifty-one in 1901, which probably explains the sad limbo into which his reputation fell. *Winter Colors*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.30), displays Eaton's fine skills as a draftsman with a sure technical feel for detail and a facile expression of atmosphere and mood. Eaton has used the white reserve of the paper to establish the major part of the pictorial image, while laying in neutral tones to delineate the negative areas and give shape to the natural forms. Harking back to the artist's early work in illustration, *Winter Colors* retains a picturesque narrative quality, but Charles Harry Eaton, like so many of his colleagues, soon took up a more progressive tonal style. Something of his stellar reputation in this regard is reflected in a *New York Times* review of the 1897 American Watercolor Society annual exhibition. "C. Harry Eaton comes to the front in a 'Bit of the Pond,' so rich, deep, and luscious in color, so tender in sentiment, and so delightful in every way as to enhance even his high reputation."[43] It is possible that *Pond at Sunset*, circa 1897 (fig. 5.31), is the reviewed watercolor, a masterpiece of freely applied washes of diaphanous color, expressive form,

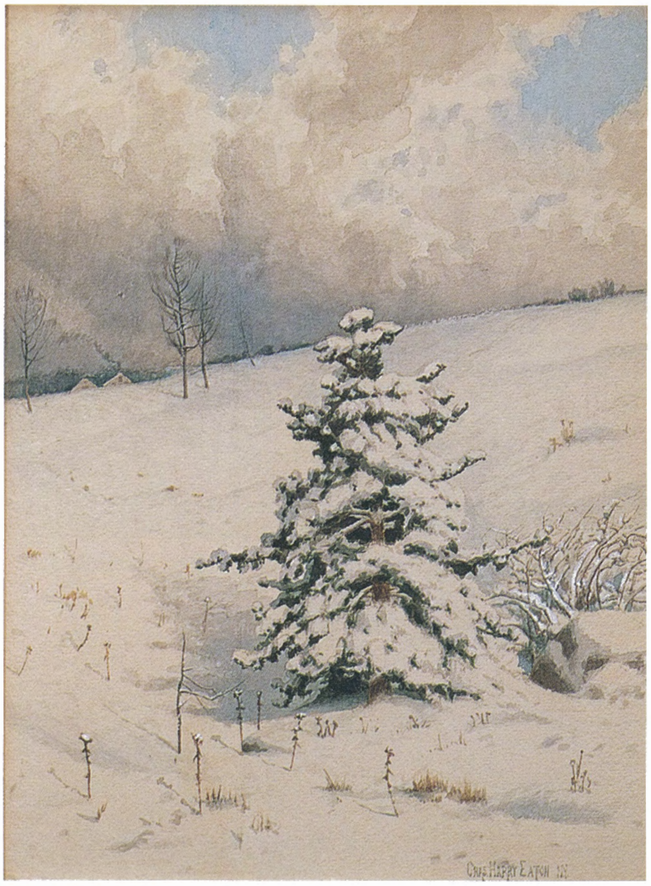


Fig. 5.30. Charles Harry Eaton, *Winter Colors*, c. 1890s. Watercolor, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

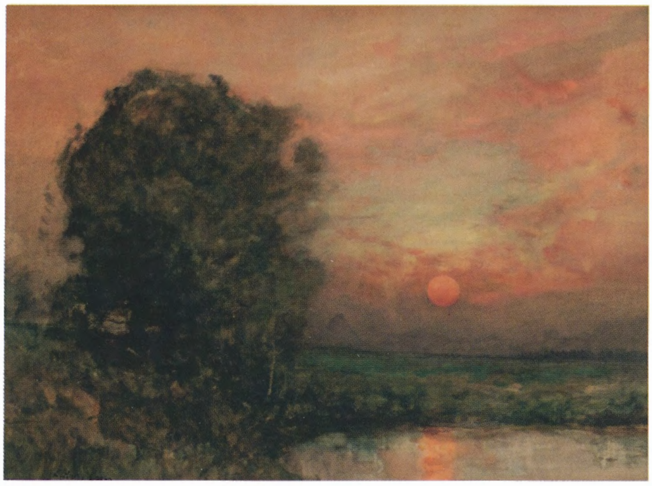


Fig. 5.31. Charles Harry Eaton, *Pond at Sunset*, c. 1897. Watercolor, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

and meticulous construction, with just enough detail to ground the scene in ravishing reality. In the years before his death, Eaton, like a large number of his fellow artists, was moving toward a bolder style, simplifying his forms and giving them greater symbolic weight. Charles Harry Eaton won the prestigious Evans Prize at the American Watercolor Society annual exhibition in 1898, just a few years before his tragic early death in 1901.

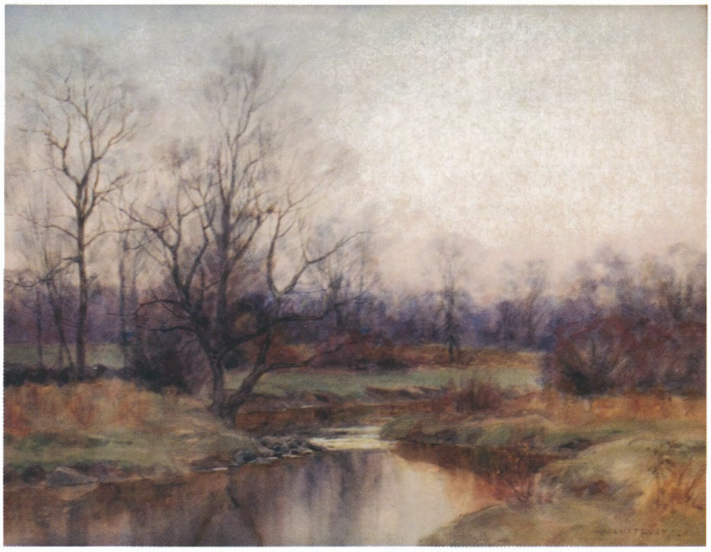


Fig. 5.32. William Merritt Post, *Autumn Stream*, c. 1895. Watercolor, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

William Merritt Post (1856–1935)

William Merritt Post, another member of the New York Water Color Club, was a Connecticut artist who specialized in local landscapes of streams and rivers bordered by abandoned pastures and wooded copses. Although Post was a technical standout in oils, much of his finest watercolor work has a serene profundity that is quite compelling. *Autumn Stream*, circa 1895 (fig. 5.32), though lacking the expressive virtuosity and freedom of an artist such as Charles Warren Eaton at his best, nevertheless achieves a quiet authority and deeply personal feeling for his favorite subject. The calligraphic grace of Post's tree forms set against the surrounding atmosphere—the fine balance of details and blurred tonalities—gives the watercolor a profound feeling of stillness and silence, a rendition of late autumn characterized by both sumptuous grace and great individuality.

James Henry Moser (1854–1913)

James Henry Moser was one of the few artists not based in New York to win membership in both the New York Water Color Club and the American Watercolor Society (Moser lived in Washington, DC, and taught at the Corcoran School of Art). His *Twilight, D.C.*, 1899 (fig.5.33), is a tour de force of technical finesse in the medium. Moser has captured the blurred tones of a rainy evening, but includes enough detail by scraping and lifting pigment, using a touch of yellow gouache to indicate burning lamps, to give sharpness and necessary definition. *Mountain Meadow*, 1907 (fig. 5.34), is a rare example of a Tonalist watercolor by an eastern artist depicting a western mountain landscape. Moser resists the picturesque temptation of such a scene by carefully spacing his trees to weave intricate patterns and bathing his upper slopes in lush ethereal veils of light.

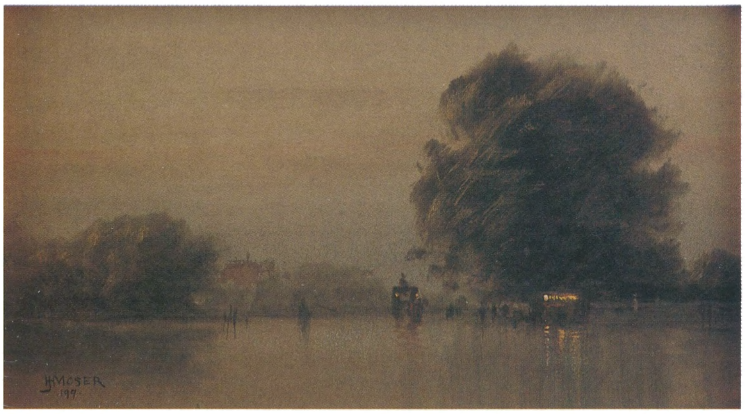


Fig. 5.33. James Henry Moser, *Twilight, D.C.*, 1899. Watercolor, 5 x 9 in. Private collection.

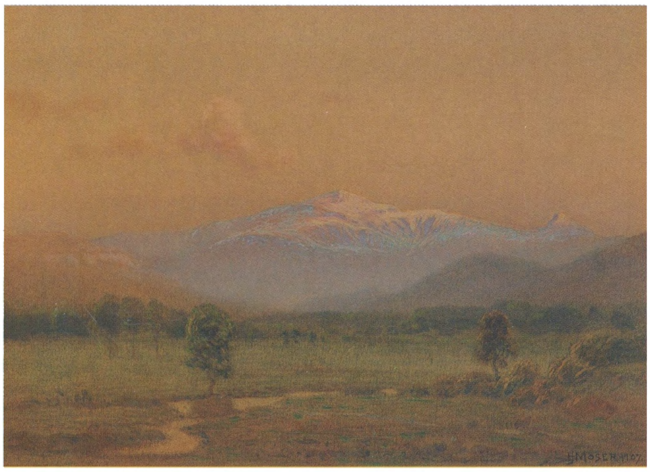


Fig. 5.34. James Henry Moser, *Mountain Meadow*, 1907. Watercolor, 10 x 15 in. Private collection.

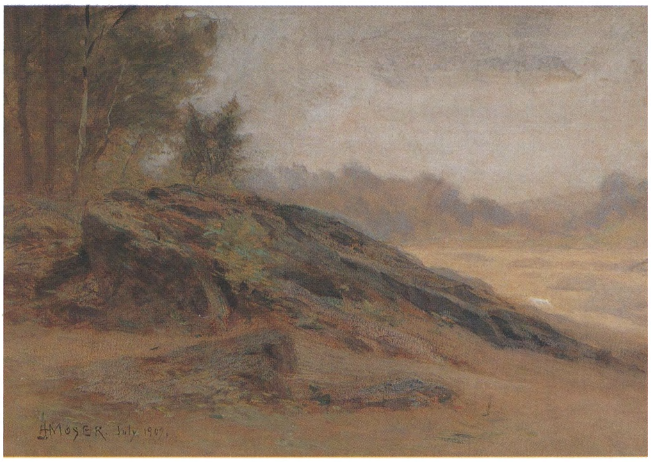


Fig. 5.35. James Henry Moser, *Near Cabin John*, 1907. Watercolor, 10 x 15 in. Private collection.

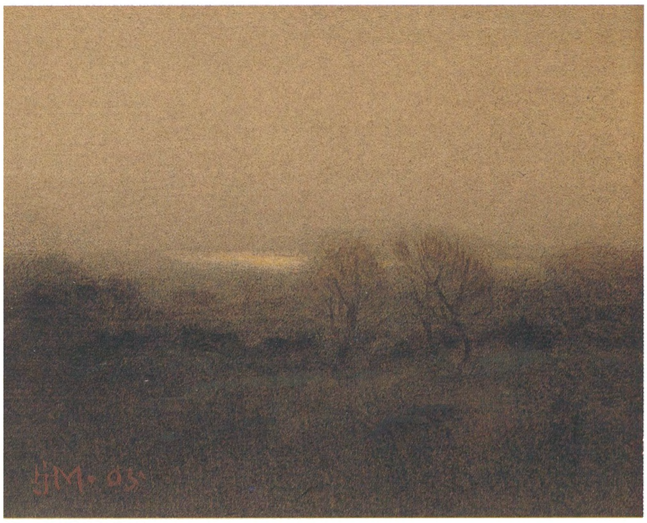


Fig. 5.36. James Henry Moser, *Dusk*, c. 1905. Watercolor, 3 x 4 in. Private collection.

Combinations of wash and gouache provide intriguing surface textures. A more intimate landscape of 1907, *Near Cabin John* (fig. 5.35), in Moser's hometown, upstream along the Potomac, has a palpable atmospheric quality that is quite uncanny. Moser has employed heavy gouaches and other techniques, including scraping and rubbing, to achieve his soft-edged and blurring effects, much along the lines of what Henry Snell called "dry water color," a technique Snell had been promoting among American artists at the New York Water Color Club around 1905. A laudatory 1906 review by the *New York Times* of the American Watercolor Society noted the "brilliant yet soft woodlands of James Henry Moser," which may well refer to the subtle moisture-laden landscapes like that depicted in *Near Cabin John*. Moser spent his summers in Cornwall Hollow in the Connecticut hills—not far from the Tonalist artist Ben Foster—which served to anchor Moser's deep feeling for the abandoned homesteads and variegated landscapes of New England. *Dusk*, circa 1905 (fig. 5.36), is an exquisite, minimalist, transcendental rendering of the effects of dusk across an old apple orchard. The tiny scale and the near-infinite shadings of tone give the watercolor— a masterpiece of understatement in the medium—added poignancy and ethereal carrying power. The work provides yet another example of the modernist direction of the finest Tonalist watercolorists of the era.

Henry Snell (1858–1943)

Henry Snell, like his close friend William Lathrop, is best known as a Bucks County School painter; Snell specialized in marine subjects or coastal views, especially of his childhood haunts in Cornwall, England. He taught at the Philadelphia School of Design from 1899 to 1943 and he is remembered today primarily for his connection to the Bucks County School of landscape artists, which has led to the obscuring of his early importance in New York watercolor circles. Snell's early career in the 1880s and 1890s has been almost entirely forgotten, although he was in the forefront of the Tonalist watercolor movement, becoming president of both the New York Water Color Club and the American Watercolor Society. As has been previously noted, Snell had a reputation for innovation in

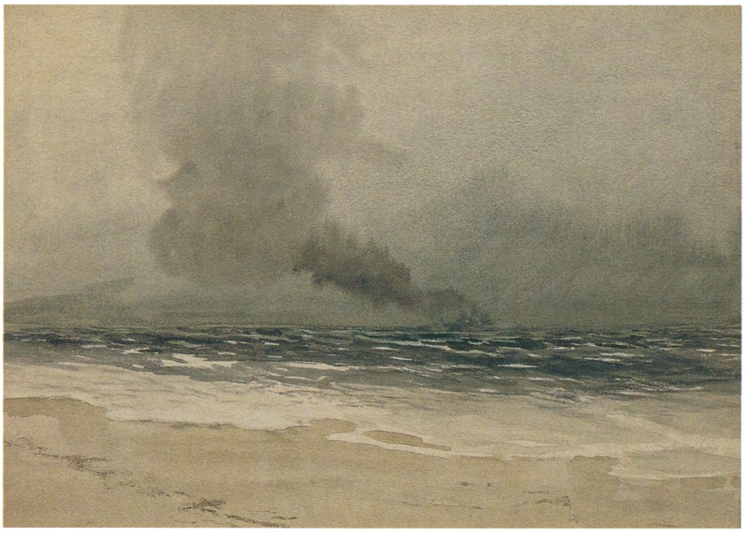


Fig. 5.37. Henry Snell, *Steaming Homeward*, c. 1890s. Watercolor, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

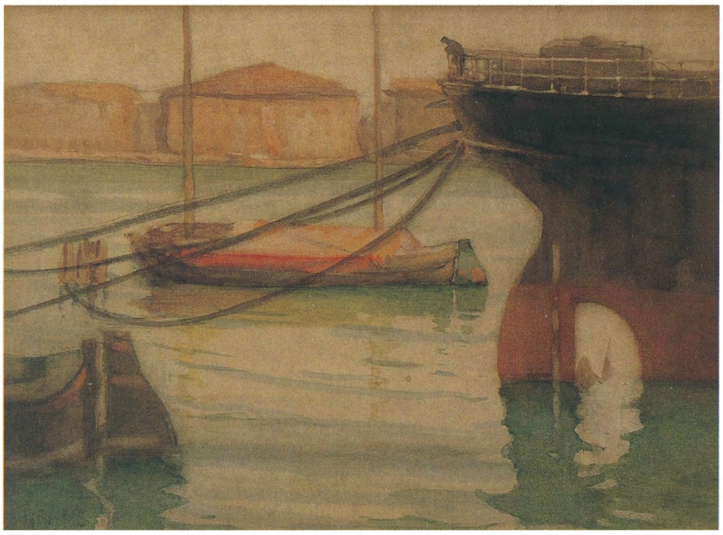


Fig. 5.38. Henry Snell, *Venetian Shipping*, c. 1905. Watercolor, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

watercolor technique and was not shy about touting the progressive virtues of the American artists in the New York Water Color Club, and presumably in the older American Watercolor Society. *Steaming Homeward*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.37), displays Snell's virtuosity in the medium. The entire range of effects is achieved with the barest of resources: various tints of gray washes, graphite lines, and the blank reserve of the paper to imply whitecaps. By these most delicate means, Snell conveys the muted reflections of light off sand and shallow breakers. Snell's innovations in watercolor were probably motivated by his oil painting style that, around 1900, emphasized broadly brushed tonal planes to create a spare and graphic feel for the armature of his subjects. Almost without exception, his compositions generate a decorative interest in surface pattern and sensuous paint application. *Venetian Shipping*, circa 1905 (fig. 5.38), reflects Snell's competitive instincts and determination to evolve his watercolor technique along "distinctively American and original lines." Here he employs a variety of technical manipulations, including the brushing on of pigments to approximate the smooth feel of oil paint in certain passages, while in others a more traditional wet-into-wet technique is apparent. Snell has manipulated the surface, too, by blotting and lifting, or simply rubbing down the pigment to allow the surface tone of the paper to show through. The railing of the moored ship is a tour de force of exquisite manipulation in its own right; the glinting highlights along the railings are achieved, without recourse to gouache, by exposing the white of the paper reserve with extreme dexterity. The "delicate atmospheric effects" noted and admired by the *New York Times* reviewer (probably Charles de Kay) in 1905, are produced through the cumulative force of subtle and deft development of surface textures.[44] It is typical of Snell that not only is his scene of Venice far from traditionally picturesque but it is also undeniably prosaic; at the same time his interest in the beauty of floating tonal planes that both recede and move to the fore, the juxtaposition and jostling of analogous forms, and the overall complexity of decorative patterns give the work a marvelous formal quality. Something of the growing influence of watercolor technique on oil technique, and vice versa, can be observed in Snell's oil of a very similar subject, *Under the Bow, Venice*, circa 1900 (see fig. 4.3).

As early as 1896, a *New York Times* review of a Lotos Club watercolor show noted Snell's innovative methods in a watercolor of an English village as "delightful in harmony of tone, refined in color, and puzzling in its attractive, soft technique."[44] The puzzling technique may have something to do with Snell's "dry water color," which gave the artist's watercolors, and those of some of his contemporaries and followers like Henry Moser, a muted pastel-like feel and a powdery atmospheric quality that anticipate the use of casein, egg tempera, and other modern mediums that revolutionized the look and feel of works on paper in the twentieth century. In 1900, Snell won an honorable mention at the Paris Exposition Universelle for a watercolor. Among many awards, he also won the Beale Prize at the New York Water Color Club in 1905, surely an acknowledgment by the finest watercolorists of the day.

Arthur Hoeber (1854–1915)

Arthur Hoeber's *Connecticut Idyll*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.39), exhibits an extraordinary delicacy of conception and vibrancy of atmospheric quality. Hoeber, who, as discussed in chap. 3, studied in Paris and was captivated by the gray tones of Brittany, here translates the haunting airy feel of his European sojourns into a humid summer scene in a Connecticut backwater. There is something of a Whistlerian ethereality in Hoeber's rendition of a quiet bankside, which is also reminiscent of John Henry Twachtman's flair for Oriental-inspired design found in his

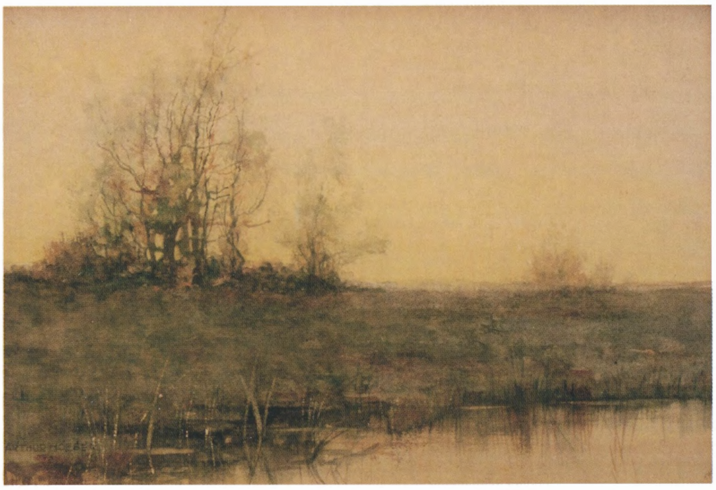


Fig. 5.39. Arthur Hoeber, *Connecticut Idyll,* c. 1890s. Watercolor, 6 x 10 in. Private collection.

Arques-la-Bataille of 1885 (see fig. 3.29). Hoeber has managed the supreme trick of giving just enough ravishing detail to contrast with and set off the broadly washed-in backdrop of air and light. The artist displays an array of technical effects in the foreground river reeds, some produced with blotting, others by scratching with a needle point through the pigment to reveal the white of the paper, creating an array of dewy highlights that are a technical marvel.

Charles Melville Dewey (1849–1937)

Charles Melville Dewey, one of the supreme interpreters of the Tonalist landscape, was equally attuned to the subtleties of watercolor. *A Quiet Pond*, circa 1905 (fig. 5.40), is a masterwork of delicate effects, approaching the soft, lace-like decorative flower studies of John Henry Twachtman, but here in a more realistic context while displaying a similar decorative feel and evocative patterns throughout. Pond reeds and meadow flowers seem to emerge out of the misty passages of deftly modulated tones, mere spectral wraiths of wildflowers—or sensations of light and blowing color. Dewey's technical finesse as a watercolorist is second to none, as noted by Charles de Kay in a Macbeth Gallery review of 1909. "Charles Melville Dewey shows three watercolors as limpid in executions and exquisite in tone as the best of his work, jewels of technique, and filled with the poetry of nature."[46]

Bruce Crane (1857–1937)

Bruce Crane's *Effect on the Harlem River*, circa 1890s (fig. 5.41), is a spare and dramatic winter scene by an artist who rarely worked in watercolor. When he did employ the medium, it was often snowy landscapes that served as inspiration; watercolor perfectly suited Crane's desire for broad stark effects contrasted with the finest of delicate details. Here, the spiky bushes in the foreground, arranged like all the other landforms in the composition with the equipoise of a mathematician, provide a departure point for the eye's exploration. Crane had a calligraphic flair for line. Though the French artist Jean-Charles Cazin was a strong influence in Crane's development, especially the use of flat masses arranged for seamless tonal transitions, the influence here may be from Charles Warren Eaton's watercolors and oils of winter scenes from the late 1880s. Whistler and the Aesthetic movement certainly influenced the strong decorative patterning found in the stream, tree lines, and rocky walls, and the broad swatch of diaphanous gray light that weighs on the horizon—a weight that is as much about the surface quality of the pigment, teetering on the foremost plane of the composition, as the approach of darkness, closing fast at the end of a cold winter day. The brittle starkness of the imagery is a signature mark of Crane's work in watercolor and sets the stage for much of the artist's innovative work in oils of a later date.

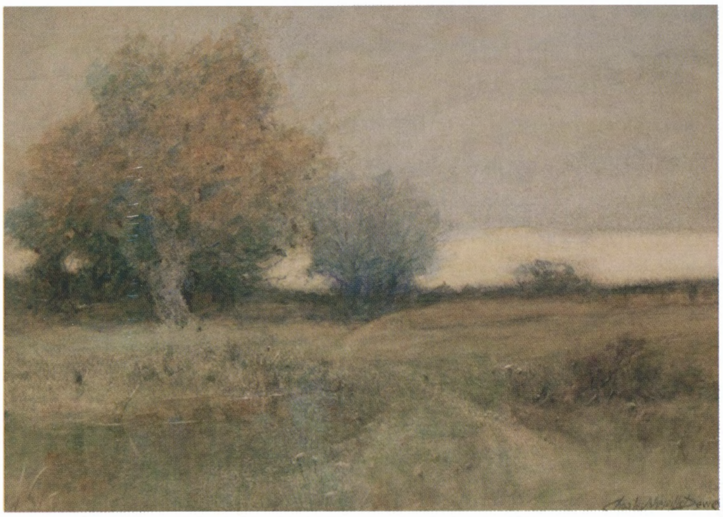


Fig. 5.40. Charles Melville Dewey, *A Quiet Pond*, c. 1905. Watercolor, 15 x 21 in. Private collection.

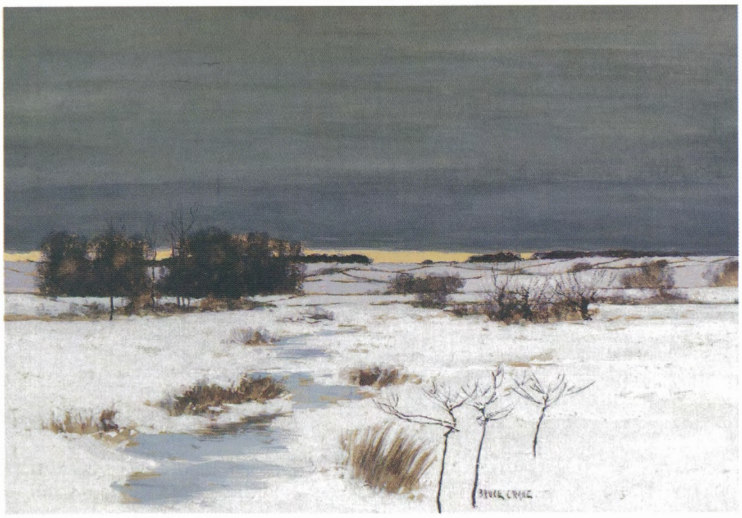


Fig. 5.41. Bruce Crane, *Effect on the Harlem River*, c. 1890s. Watercolor, 13 x 19 in. Courtesy Eliot and Sandra Chack.

Hermann Dudley Murphy (1867–1945)

New Englander, Hermann Dudley Murphy, born in 1867, just after the prime generation of Tonalists (those born 1840–1865), was nevertheless weaned on Tonalism and the Aesthetic movement in his early training, utterly absorbing Whistlerian influences in Paris and Venice and the more decorative aspects of Tonalism at home. Murphy was one of the finest draftsmen of his day; he taught drawing at Harvard for more than thirty years and became a member of the New York Water Color Club in 1903. The color monotype *Wheat Field*, circa 1905 (fig. 5.42), demonstrates Murphy's complete mastery of the expressive effects available to the artist in works on paper, and is another example of the innovations taking place in combining watercolor, pastel, and monotypes, not to mention woodblock printing. Murphy uses a high horizon (derived from examples of Japanese prints), both in his foreground stalks of wheat and in his background of hills and trees, pushing both planes to the surface, and thus enhancing throughout the decorative arrangements of form and the scintillating surface textures of the inked paper. In addition, the artist uses strokes of blue to highlight certain features. The result is an extraordinary image that reads with subtle graphic power, at the same time concentrating the full visual energy of the shimmering green atmosphere on the paper surface—vibrant and full of silent motion—evoking a palpable feel of late summer dusk. Meticulous design and deep emotional power are seamlessly merged in this small-scale landscape. Murphy's gifts for design flowed just as easily into the decorative arts; Murphy was a member of the Byrdcliffe Arts Community at Woodstock in 1905, and was a founder, in 1903, of the Carrig-Rohane frame company with Charles Prendergast.

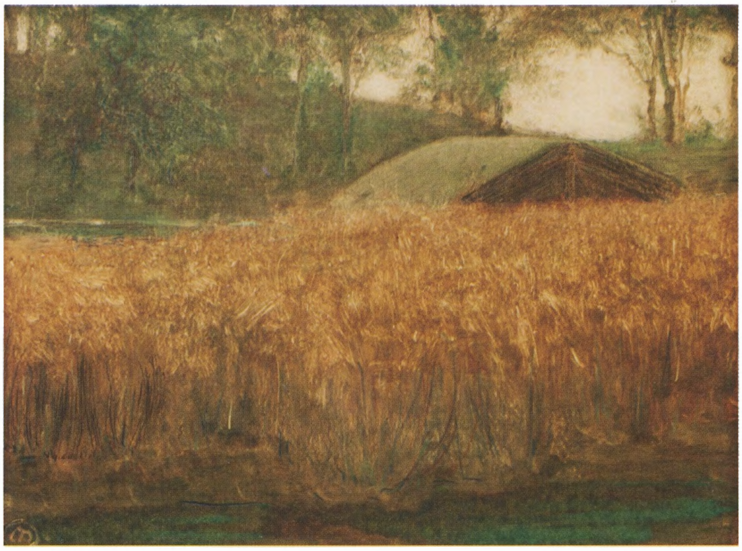


Fig. 5.42. Hermann Dudley Murphy, *Wheat Field*, c. 1905. Color monotype, 6½ x 9 in. Private collection.

Charles Fromuth (1861–1937)

Charles Fromuth, perhaps with the exception of Henry Muhrman, John Henry Twachtman, and James McNeill Whistler was the finest "painter in pastel"—as he liked to refer to himself—of his generation. He was certainly one of the most single-minded artists of his age. It is hard to think of another artist who dedicated himself so completely to his work and explored so fully his chosen subject matter—the dockside sardine fleets moored in the harbor of Concarneau, in France—as did Fromuth. Trained by Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Fromuth came to study in Paris in 1889 with already formidable skills in draftsmanship and an understanding of the geometries of moving water. Fromuth was so influenced by Eakins's feel for modeling form in paint in a plastic manner—as opposed to the French academic insistence on linear form—that he simply walked away from the Académie Julian and the withering criticism of Bouguereau. As Fromuth so aptly put it in his journals, "So, I drew according to my education and my gift impulses—that is *emotively*. . . ."[47] He drifted over to Brittany and the artists' colony of Concarneau and stayed for over forty-five years. Among the docks and fishing boats he discovered the obsession that was to haunt his art for decades. "What a background mine, the old Ville Close, little island village walled in with fortification of everlasting granite reporting centuries of weather wear and the salt sea air, decked with lichen, moss at home in every crevice. Sea encircled with docks, quays, jetties all around. I never tire studying it as my background for my subject matter, which seems inexhaustible."[48] Fromuth gave up any lingering interest in figure work, and then oils, to concentrate entirely on pastel by 1905.

The expressive quality of the thick pastel stroke on toothy paper allowed him to capture in look and even feel the protean nature of calm water, and the air and light ever in motion on its surface. Even though the sardine luggers with their tawny red sails were his ostensible subject, the soft gray coastal light of Brittany, which had inspired so many of his compatriots, reflected on the surface of the harbor remained his ultimate focus. Only Monet at Giverny came close to so thoroughly delving into the nature of reflected light in all its infinite facets and manifestations as did Fromuth in Concarneau between 1889 and 1937. *Concarneau, Sardine Boats, Dec. 8*, 1895 (fig. 5.44), captures the early years of Fromuth's burgeoning obsession for his favored subject matter, when his angle of view still encompassed aspects of the picturesque. His work from 1895 on began to concentrate single-mindedly on the patterns of the aqueous light of the harbor, which created arabesques and twisting parabolas of merging tones (*A Dark Harmony: Fishing Boats*, 1889, fig. 5.45). Almost all of Fromuth's compositions establish a low angle to the water to better encompass the

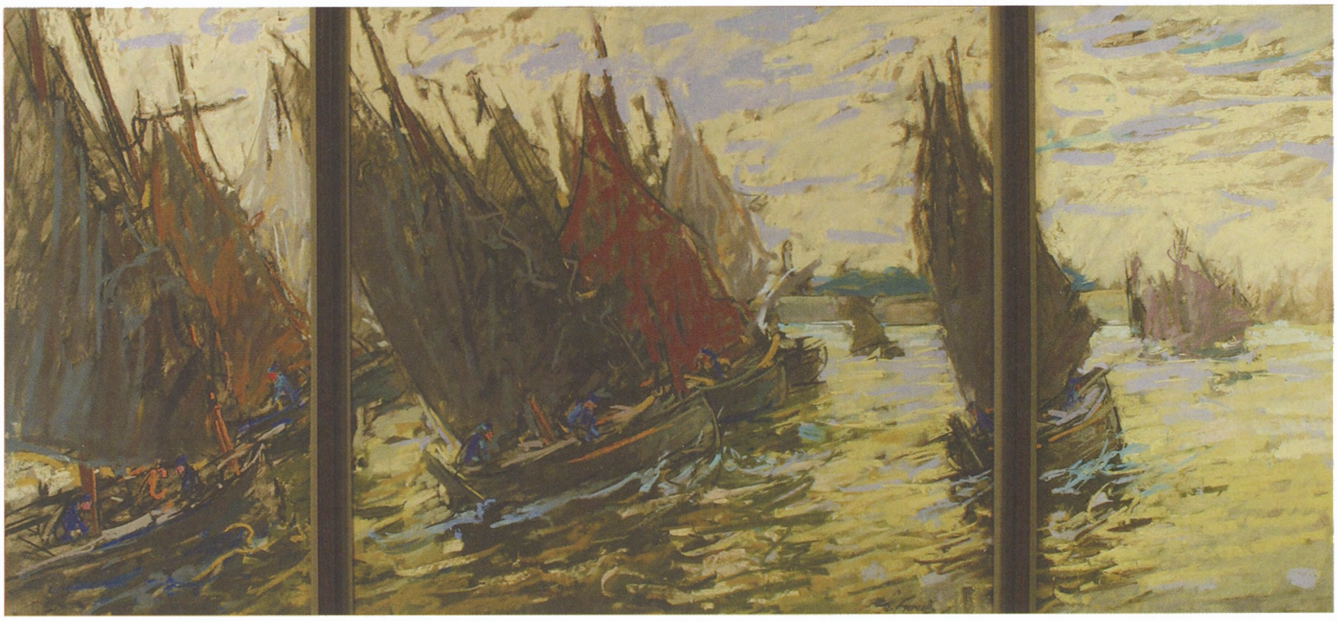


Fig. 5.43. Charles Fromuth,. *The Fleet's Departure, October Morning, 1931/35*, c. 1931–35. Pastel, 29½ x 61 in. Courtesy Schwarz Gallery.

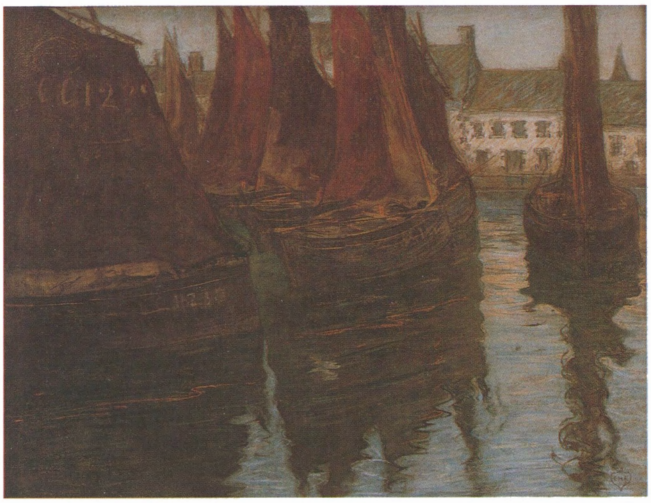


Fig. 5.44. Charles Fromuth, *Concarneau, Sardine Boats, Dec. 8,* 1895. Pastel, 17 x 23 in. Private collection.

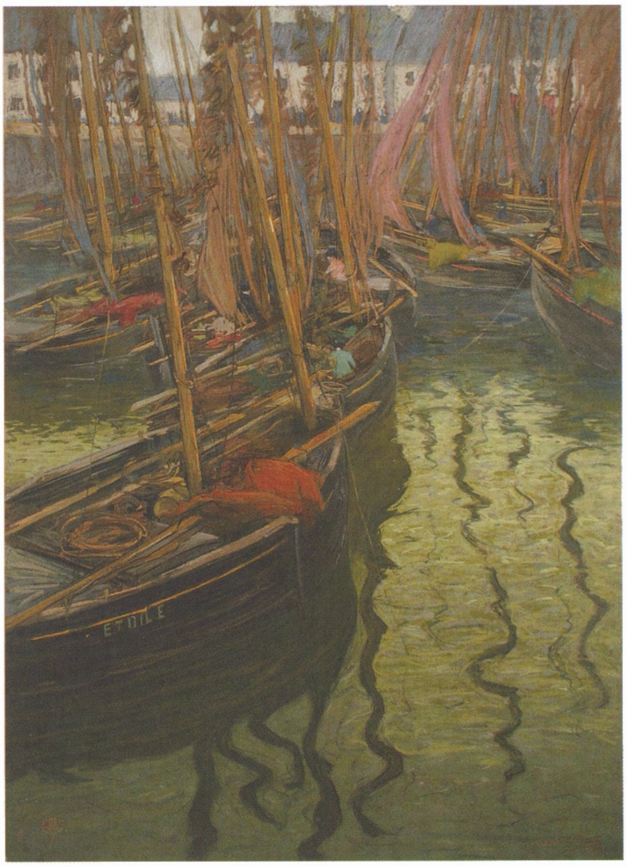


Fig. 5.45. Charles Fromuth, *A Dark Harmony, Fishing Boats*, 1889. Pastel, 51⅛ x 38¼ in. Courtesy Schwarz Gallery.

reflected shapes of the boats, sky, and air; everything is arranged to elucidate the inherent patterns, some decorative, some geometric, found in the incidental life of Concarneau. Fromuth brilliantly employed modernist techniques of cropping, compression, eliminations of inessentials—much in the tradition of the Japanese Hokusai's woodblocks of which he was enamored—to highlight color tone patterns or emphasize the repeated shapes of the sardine haulers, especially their sails and rigging when lined up at dock. His journals offer further insights into his infatuation with color. "The sand coast here is of yellow sand; the wet sand is violet; the waves are greenish falling over into a foam of a greenish warm white. The whole sea aspect is a combination of greenish and violet coloration, for sandy bottoms makes the water greenish, while the sea weed sections produce a purplish color on surface. The sky near the horizon was flesh colored tone, while the upper clouds were tinged with a pale crepuscule violet and gray coloration."[49] *The Fleet's Departure, October Morning, 1931/35*, circa 1931–35 (fig. 5.43), displays Fromuth's facility for both decorative brilliance and scintillating light and color effects—only enhanced by

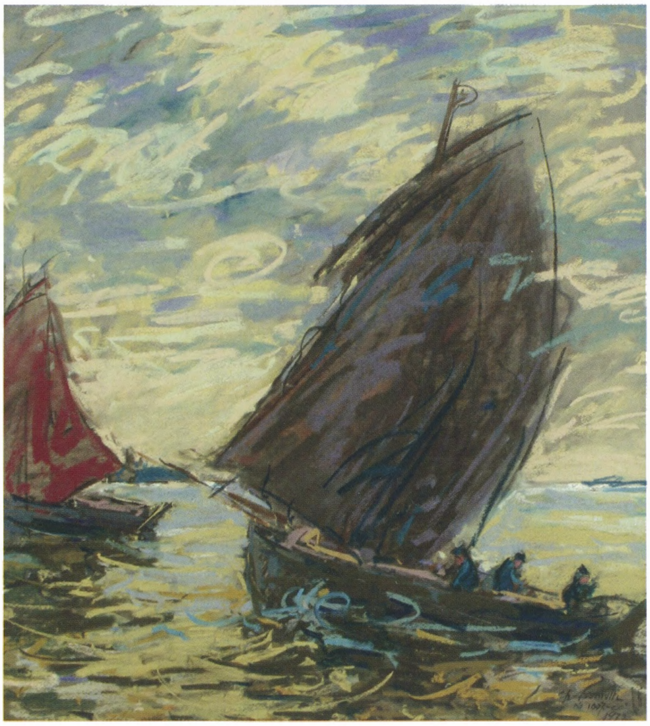


Fig. 5.46. Charles Fromuth, *Sardine Boats Sailing North Northeast*, 1932. Pastel, 29½ x 26½ in. Courtesy Schwarz Gallery.

more than forty years of dedication to his subject. His use of the triptych format creates a sensation of windblown speed and highlights the lively array of patterns and reflected color tones on the sea's surface. This melding of dexterous and extraordinarily expressive draftsmanship in the depiction of the sardine fleet in full sale and the sensuous organic shapes—transformed and vivified in the mirroring movement of the water, as well as the contiguous tones that create an energized atmospheric envelope—display the full resources of the pastel medium as few artists of the day were able to do.

By 1895, Fromuth was being well received in the Paris Salons and attracting the attention of major artists like Alexander Harrison (who bought three pastels in 1894), Fritz Thaulow, and Auguste Rodin, who visited him and bought his works. Americans Robert Henri and William Redfield—both from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts—also were friends, and Fromuth's soft, beautifully controlled tonal evocations of Concarneau's harbor may well have inspired their crepuscular views of Paris and the Seine around 1900. With the resurgence of Whistlerian aesthetics at the turn of the century, Fromuth's decorative and dreamy studies of tone patterns, touching on the preserves of the Symbolists and organic geometries of Art Nouveau, put his art on the leading edge of the progressive movement. By 1900, Fromuth and Henry Muhrman were winning prizes in Paris and Munich and even back home at the World's Fair of 1904, where both won gold medals for pastels.

Fromuth exhibited infrequently in his homeland and a traveling show of his work in 1910 drew great praise but few sales. The *New York Times* reviewer (probably de Kay) was astonished at the spiritual grace and pictorial acuity of vision on view. "We seldom leave a gallery so enlivened with the sense that nature's vitality has been transferred to art . . . he has rendered the spirit of the scene . . . His "Fluid Waters at Evening" is one of the loveliest of his themes, but there are a dozen no less lovely. His translation of the clear dome of the sky, the liquid depths of the sea, the color of the sails, and the wind that blows them into big curves and decorative groupings are as far removed from the hackneyed as from strained originality. We have seen the thing done fifty times, but never so well done . . . To the artist who has tried the same juggling trade they are the expression of genius working with the same old machinery, but performing, nevertheless, a kind of miracle."[50] *Sardine Boats Sailing North Northeast*, 1932 (fig. 5.46), is the kind of virtuoso performance in vivid color and gestural handling that had prompted the *English Illustrated Magazine* in 1912 to refer to Mr. Fromuth as, "an artist of undisputed distinction, recently acknowledged to be the leading pastel painter in the world. . . ."[51] The pastel work of Fromuth, virtually absent from American art history for close to a century, is another example of the power of the Tonalist aesthetic to foster experimentation along modernist lines—an innovative heritage that a modern master of pastel and postmodern Tonalist like Wolf Kahn would take to even more dazzling heights.

Arthur B. Davies (1862–1928)

As Charles Fromuth eventually exploited the pastel's full range of resources, so Arthur B. Davies, in the last years of his life, revealed the full logic of the Tonalist watercolor, discovering its inherent abstract epiphany in his renditions of the Italian landscape. Davies was a prolific watercolorist and pastelist throughout his long career. He used watercolor as a tool for

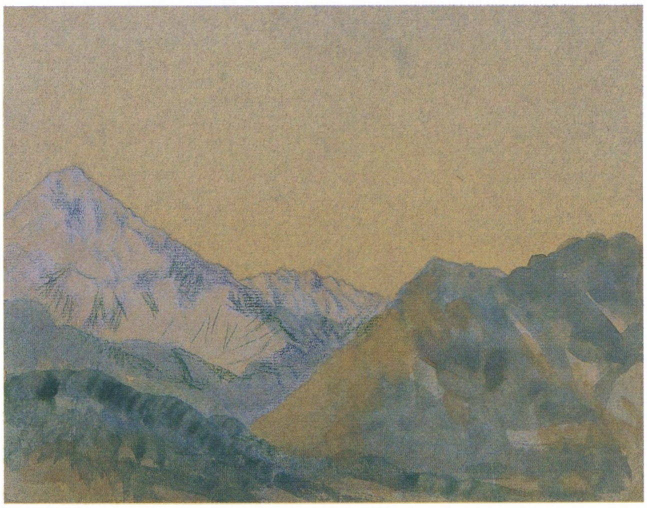


Fig. 5.47. Arthur B. Davies, *Blue Mountains*, c. 1926. Watercolor, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

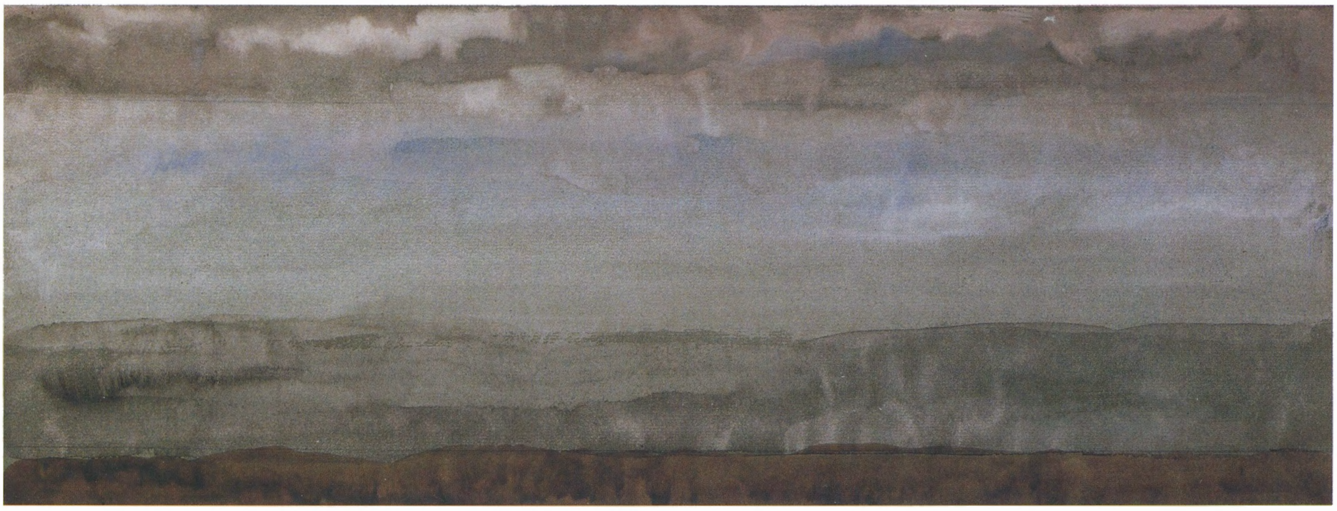


Fig. 5.48. Arthur B. Davies, *Nocturne in Blue and Green*, 1924. Watercolor, 12 x 20 in. Private collection.

studies, notes, and finished works. The medium perfectly suited his expressive and dreamy tonal style, and ultimately freed him late in his career to produce some of the finest and most innovative modern works of the day. The watercolors he produced in 1925–26 in Paris and, especially, in the Apennines of Tuscany and Umbria represent the culmination of his life's work in terms of their freedom, experimentation, and sheer exuberance of airy form. *Blue Mountains*, circa 1926 (fig. 5.47), shows Davies at his most spontaneous, allowing his washes to run rampant on the soaked paper, employing turquoise pencil to add notes of definition and shading, and permitting the toned paper itself to both harmonize and give off the sensation of vibrant light hovering above the craggy peaks. Here, economy and abstraction are combined in an unprecedented manner.

Toward the end of his life, Davies became more and more emboldened to unleash his feeling for abstraction. His posthumously exhibited *Nocturne in Blue and Green*, 1924 (fig. 5.48), pushed the Tonalist watercolor to a spiritual and abstract empyrean. Davies eliminates almost all detail to create broad horizontal swaths of deliquescent form, anticipating the dematerialized color fields of Rothko. In 1925, Davies's abstract Tonalist watercolors sold for $500 and $250 apiece to such major collectors as Abby Rockefeller and Duncan Phillips. A *New York Times* reviewer of a Ferargil Gallery posthumous exhibition in 1929 (on the eve of the Great Depression) could barely contain his enthusiasm. "The writer cannot recall having seen, by any hand, water colors more poignantly beautiful. They are full of a somber translucence; it is the hour of pearl and dusk, never that of the sun's noon-flush; yet so vividly felt and so without mawkishness rendered. Before our eyes the world dissolves. Matter and spirit, in the true mystical sense, are seen to be one. Light lingers where it may, and fails with a majestic slowness. Far off through the mist, gypsy crags or summits smile, about to vanish. 'Good-bye!' they seem to call across the void."[52] Such encomiums in early 1929 perfectly sum up the lingering spell of the Tonalist movement for a generation, even as the movement was on the brink of its demise, and just as the ideas of a mystical merging of "matter and spirit" into one were in turn bequeathed to modernists like John Marin and Arthur Dove, who explored the watercolor medium—certainly in their early work—very much along lines similar to Arthur B. Davies. In 1962, critic John Canaday reiterated the importance of Davies's Umbrian landscapes of 1925–26, calling them "Davies [*sic*] finest work, in which the delicacy that was all his own is harmonized for the first time with an elaborate but firm organizational scheme. . . ."[53]

Tonalism, James McNeill Whistler, and the Print Revival

If Whistler's influence on the art world after his stay in Venice was dramatic, his influence on the medium of etching was nothing less than revolutionary: he changed the medium and the message. The Tonalist etching was virtually born in the cold winter of Venice in 1880–81 as Whistler produced his first and second Venice sets, contracted by the Fine Arts Society in London. His painterly effects, liquid use of plate tone, and offbeat views of Venice—produced hand in hand with his greatest pastels—precipitated a print revival in America and Europe that only gained momentum and rising prices, right through the 1920s, when the Depression destroyed the market for the medium. The etching revival he sparked runs like an undercurrent through the entire history of the Tonalist movement, influencing the pastel, watercolor, and oil mediums in terms of scale, monochromatic tonality, and decorative simplicity. Frank Duveneck, who overlapped Whistler's stay in Venice, actually sent his etching *Riva Degli Schiavoni, No. 2*, 1880 (fig. 5.49), to London before Whistler, where it was first exhibited by the Fine Arts Society. Many suspected it to be by Whistler, convinced the master was, yet again, playing a trick on his ongoing nemesis, the London critics. Whistler, piqued

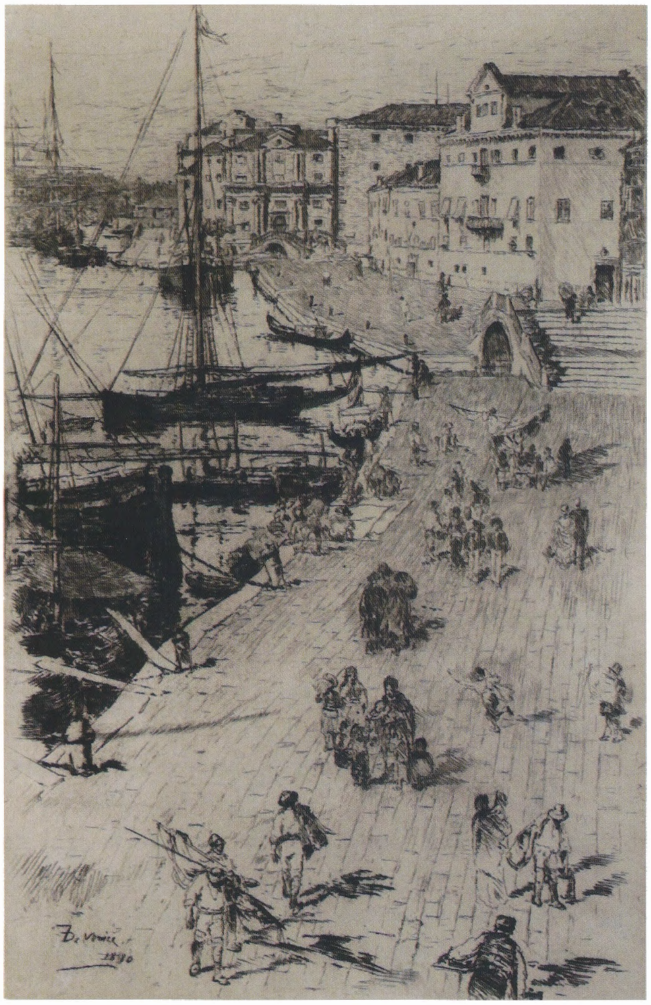


Fig. 5.49. Frank Duveneck, *Riva Degli Schiavoni, No. 2*, 1880. Etching, 13 x 8½ in. Private collection.

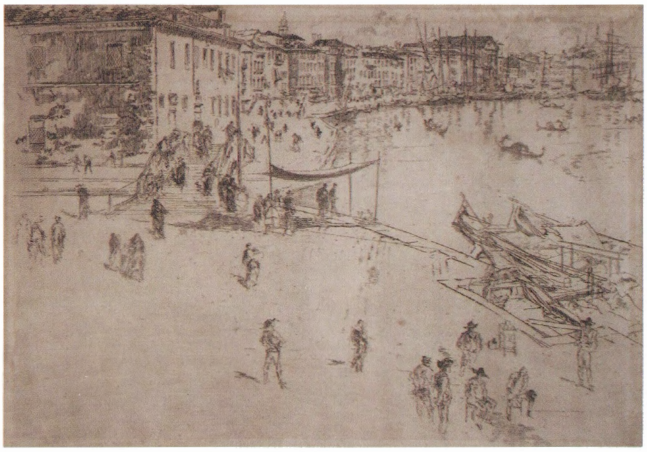


Fig. 5.50. James McNeill Whistler, *The Riva No. 2*, 1880–81. Etching, 8½ x 12 in. Private collection.

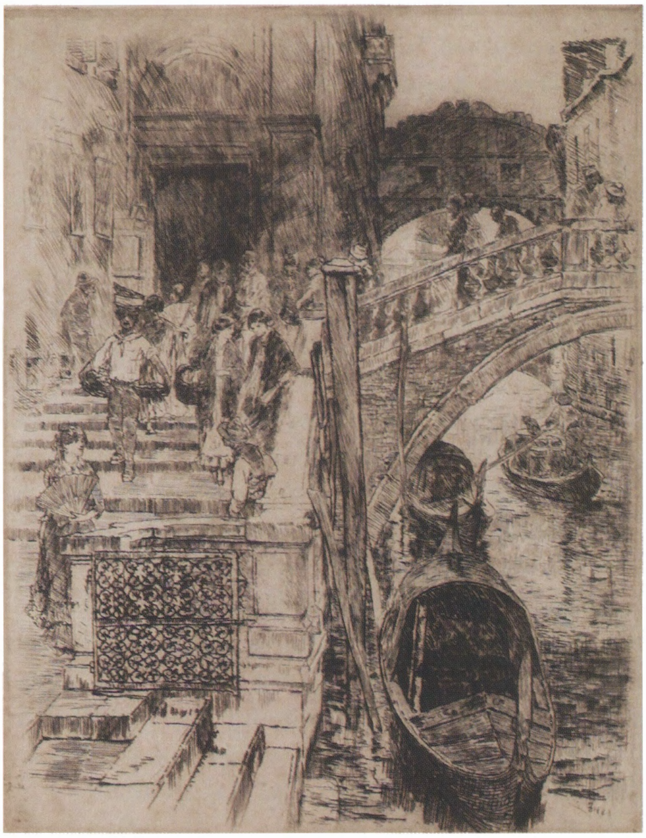


Fig. 5.51. Frank Duveneck, *The Bridge of Sighs*, 1883. Etching, 11 x 8½ in. Private collection.

by the mix-up, was galvanized into action and produced his own Venice waterside views. His etching *The Riva No. 2*, 1880–81 (fig. 5.50), employs more tone and intimacy of perception than Duveneck, concentrating visual energy on the immediate foreground. Whistler moved increasingly in the direction of nuance and off-kilter vignettes of the city, producing etchings with a dark somber beauty, including *The Two Doorways*, 1880 (see fig. 3.72) and *Nocturne*, 1879–80 (see fig. 3.67), that have as much to do with the artist's struggle with his inner demons—Whistler was bankrupt and his reputation under threat—as with a Venice barren of visitors.

Whistler's use of minimalist detail and a shimmering low tonality was soon imitated by every major printmaker of his generation (and the next), including Duveneck. On his return to Venice in 1882, Duveneck tried to integrate Whistler's subtle feeling for subdued light into his more prosaic compositions. In *The Bridge of Sighs*, 1883 (fig. 5.51), which survives in a rare first state that did not withstand multiple printings, Duveneck struggled to capture the illusive effects of shadow and movement Whistler so loved to portray. Duveneck's *San Pietro in Castello*, circa 1883 (fig. 5. 52), succeeds even more; by forgoing the standard-fare denizens of Venice that populate many of his Venetian works, the artist engages the viewer with a more dynamic perspective, low to the water, and brings into play the kind of kinetic design and silhouetted patterns first exploited in Japanese woodblocks. Duveneck's growing feel for a work's decorative quality and unity of values fast became de rigeur in advanced artistic circles.

John Henry Twachtman, too, came under the spell of Whistler, indirectly by way of the "Duveneck boys," with whom he spent a winter teaching in Florence in 1880–81. On a

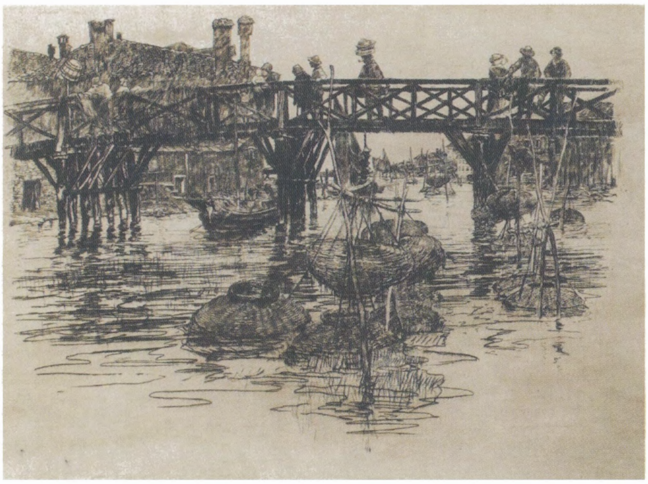


Fig. 5.52. Frank Duveneck, *San Pietro in Castello*, c. 1883. Etching, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

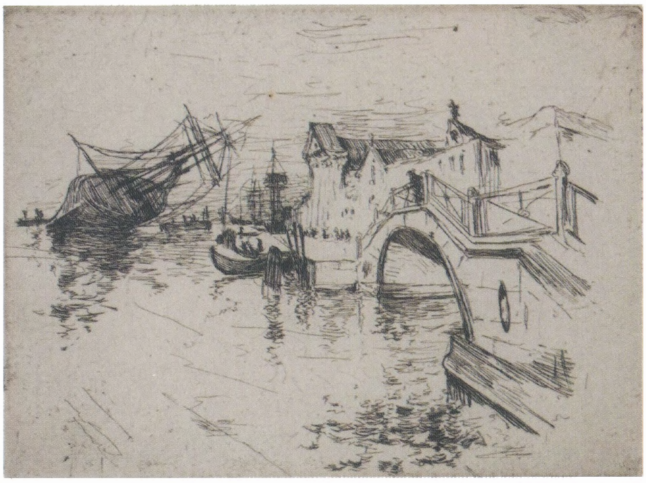


Fig. 5.53. John Henry Twachtman, *The Zattere*, c. 1881. Etching, 3¼ x 5 in. Private collection.

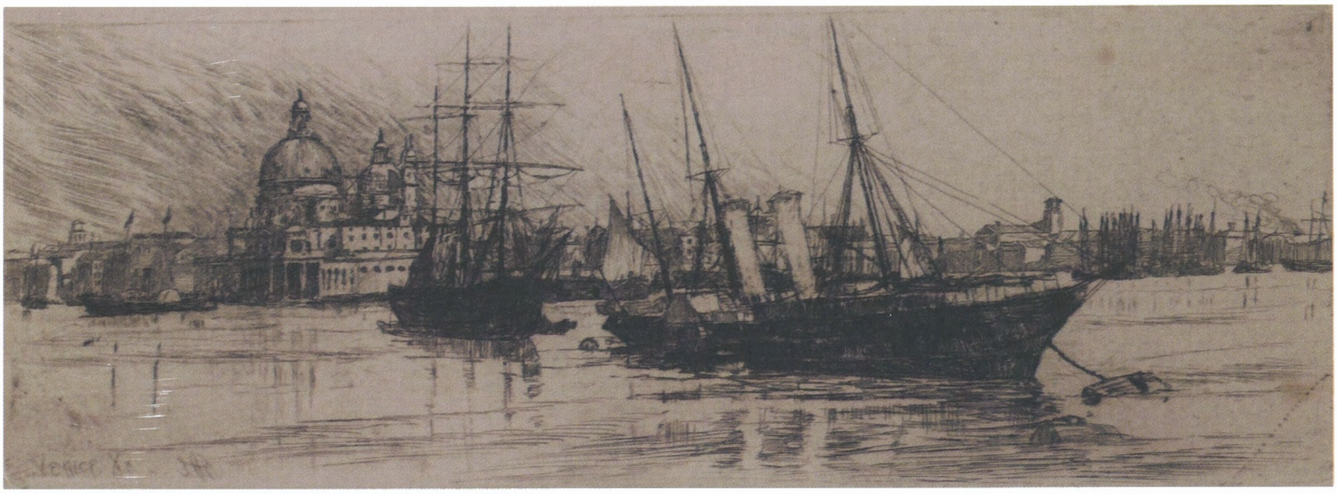


Fig. 5.54. Otto Bacher, *Two Boats, Venice*, 1880. Etching, 3½ x 9 in. Private collection.

subsequent visit to Venice he produced *The Zattere*, circa 1881 (fig. 5.53), an exquisite etching of a ship undergoing repairs, produced with delicate and wispy hatching and the inclusion of a few sparse details, a mode which he would continue to employ in his print work in Holland and later in Greenwich, Connecticut. Otto Bacher (1856–1909), joined Duveneck's boys in Venice and proved critical for Whistler—who used Bacher's press (supposedly once used by Canaletto) to pull some of his first proofs—and quickly became a disciple of the master, disseminating Whistler's technical secrets and modernist style through his writings and examples of his own etchings. Bacher's *Two Boats, Venice*, 1880 (fig. 5.54), represents a more prosaic take on Whistler's images of Venetian shipping, though the artist's use of soft flowing lines and formal design elements adds enormously to the etching's intimate warmth and charm. *Rialto*, 1880 (fig. 5.55), projects a feeling of dynamic expansion, even in a compressed horizontal format, by virtue of the concentration on line and tone in the foreground doings of the sleeping boatmen, which leads the eye to a more sketchily rendered Rialto bridge in the background. The intimate life of the city is the real focus, not the tourist sites; this was the backwater Venice that Whistler first discovered, the gift he passed to his generation of artists.

The writer and artist Joseph Pennell never knew Whistler in Venice, though he certainly knew of him and his Venice etchings by the time he first visited the lagoon city in 1883. Pennell produced *On the Riva, From Pennell's Window*, 1883 (fig. 5.56), is almost an homage to the master's etchings on this subject, here adding a certain intimacy and beauty of tone by including rain and dark clouds on the horizon. Pennell would go on to become an intimate of Whistler's, and he and his wife would write an indispensable biography of the artist. Pennell was so taken by Whistler in his early career that he was even prompted to adopt his "tab" signature for his etchings. In *The Rialto*, 1883 (fig. 5.57), delicate ink wiping provides an overall harmony of atmospheric tone and adds poignancy and charm. Pennell employed many of Whistler's design strategies, especially the intersecting diagonals that lead the eye to a main point of

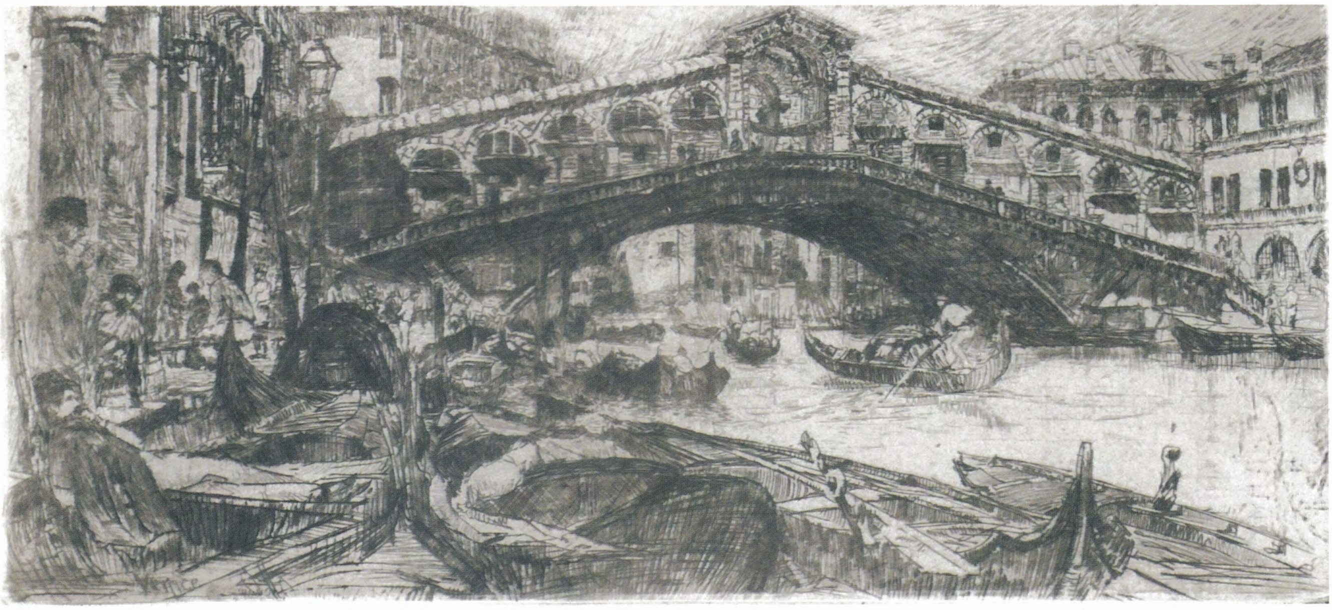


Fig. 5.55. Otto Bacher, *Rialto*, 1880. Etching, 4¾ x 9½ in. Private collection.

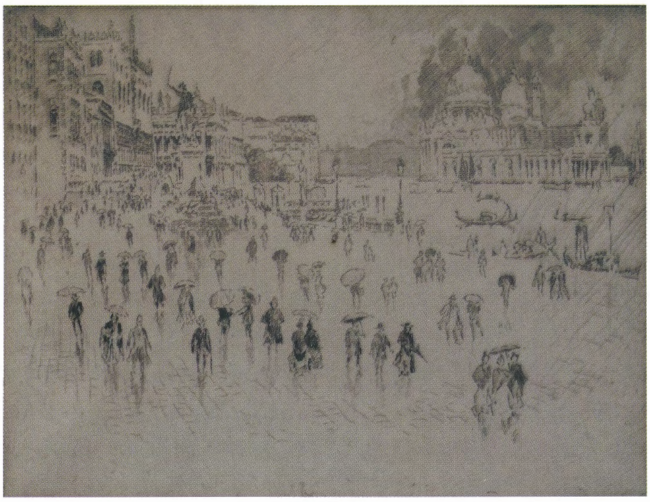


Fig. 5.56. Joseph Pennell, *On the Riva, From Pennell's Window*, 1883. Etching, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

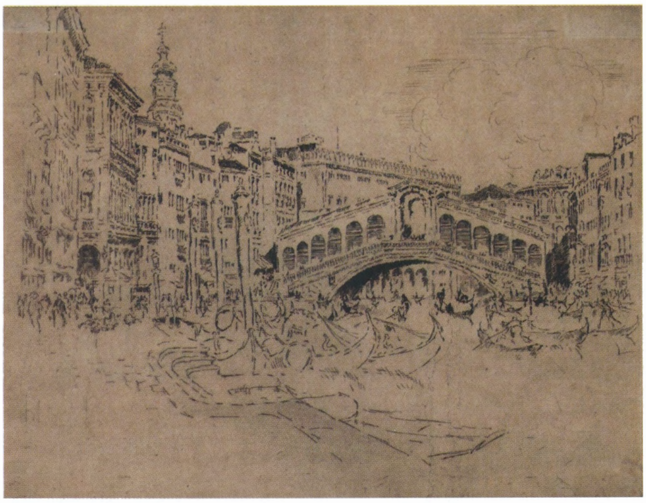


Fig. 5.57. Joseph Pennell, *The Rialto*, 1883. Etching, 10 x 12 in. Private collection.

interest—here, the boat traffic beneath the arch of the bridge. As late as 1911, Pennell was still under the spell of Whistler, but able to expand his vision with technical wizardry of his own making. *Café Orientale*, 1911 (fig. 5.58), is a tour de force of hard-won technical know-how, produced with carefully modulated ink wipings and sumptous detail, creating the sensation of interior shadow as it is infused with the bright sunlight reflected off the Riva and the distant lagoon beyond the curtained doorway. For two generations artists gathered at the Orientale or Florian's on the Piazza San Marco and swapped anecdotes about days past with Whistler, as artists still do today in Venice; his work continues to shimmer mysteriously in the imagination.

Whistler's spell thoroughly captivated some artists. Clifford Addams (1876–1942) married the artist Inez Bate, who ran Whistler's Académie Carmen in Paris during its last days before its doors were shuttered in 1900. Addams and his wife were intimates of Whistler right up to his death, and Whistler's persona as an artist and printmaker retained a hold on Addams throughout the remainder of his career, although by 1914 he had developed a quirky kaleidoscopic style, which included the busy denizens of London and Venice, very much in a modernist vein. The impact of Whistler on Addams and his generation is captured in a letter Adams wrote home to Philadelphia: "I have been able to comprehend sufficiently enough, to tell you that [Whistler's] system or craft has a depth and beauty undreamed of by me, and which I believe, once mastered, would be considered a way of working of the old Masters."[54] Addams's *Ma Porte à Venise*, 1914 (fig. 5.59), is an extraordinary updating of Whistler's Venice Nocturnes; the eccentric compositions act to flatten the planes of lagoon and sky, and the light reflected off

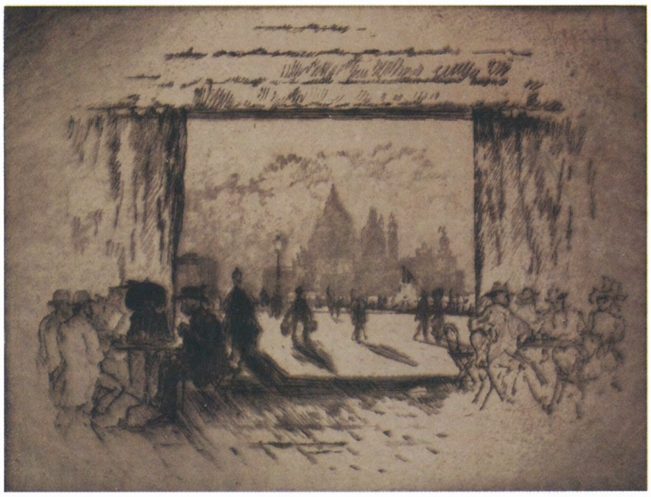


Fig. 5.58. Joseph Pennell, *Café Orientale*, 1911. Etching, 9 x 12¼ in. Private collection.

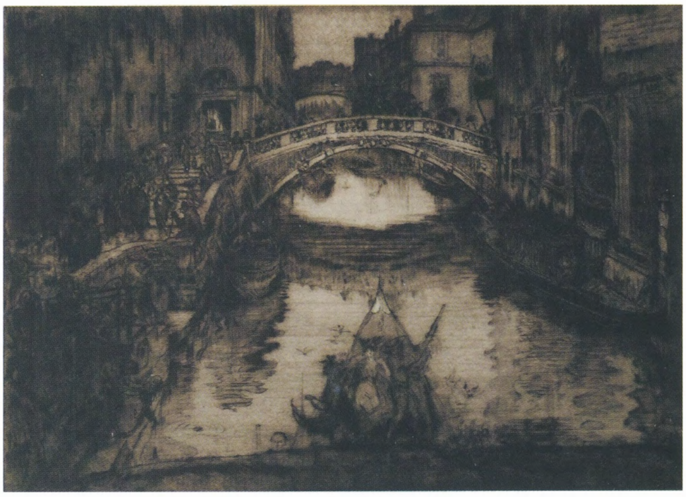


Fig. 5.60. Clifford Addams, *A Venetian Waterway*, c. 1920. Etching, 10 x 15¾ in. Private collection.

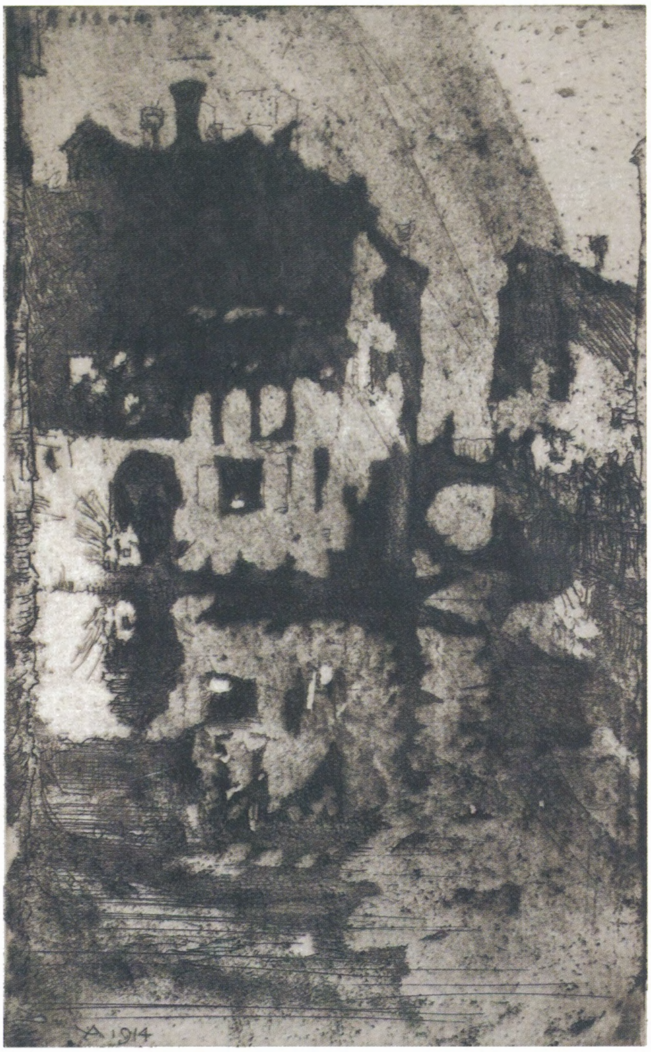


Fig. 5.59. Clifford Addams, *Ma Porte à Venise*, 1914. Etching, 8 x 5 in. Private collection.

the sides of buildings, producing patterns of silhouetted shapes that approach a Cubist disintegration of space. The use of free-hand etched lines and acquatint in jazzy counterpoint, with the white reserve of the paper giving off startling highlights, imbues the work with an edgy modernity far ahead of its time. In *A Venetian Waterway*, circa 1920 (fig. 5.60), Addams has taken a traditional view and transformed it into a lyrical and sumptuous celebration of painterly effects, all produced by prodigious technical subterfuge, delicate retroussage, and laborious reworkings of the plate. His *Venetian Fête Scene (San Giorgio: Nocturne, Venice)*, 1914 (fig. 5.61), draws on Whistler's full repertoire of dramatic tonal effects, here concentrating visual energy on the haloed light of the carried torches, which in turn send out dramatic shadows and reflected glimmers of light that scud and evaporate over the pitch-black face of the lagoon.

John Marin, too, though he would never admit it, was seduced by Whistler's intimate tonal poetry of Venice. There was an exhibition of Whistler's etchings in Venice in the spring of 1907, when Marin first traveled there, but he claimed never to have seen the show. Like his dealer Alfred Stieglitz, who did a booming business in Marin's Venetian prints, Marin preferred the world to believe he was a self-invented genius. *Palazzo Dario*, 1907 (fig. 5.62), like *Cà d'Oro*, (see fig. 3.71), is a charming homage to Whistler, especially in the use of pale retroussage to give an overall unity of tone to the architectural setting. *Bridge, Venezia*, 1907 (fig. 5.63), draws on many Whistlerian compositional strategies, including the scintillating play of negative and positive forms described by the pedestrians as they cross the tiny bridge. Marin's signature expression, the manner in which he plays with space and energizes his compositions with jostling freewheeling ink marks, has its origin in his Venetian work. His later watercolors and oils retain a distinct feel for low tonality and the armature of nature, strategies he first explored in his Venice etchings.

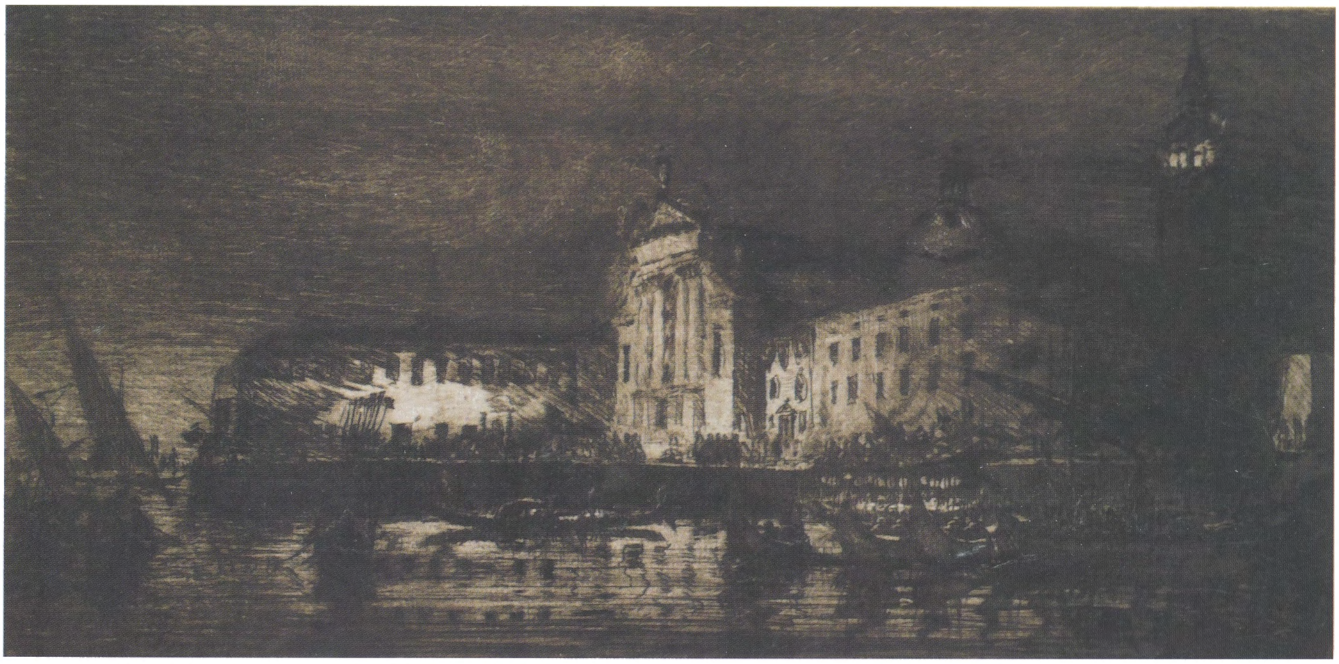


Fig. 5.61. Clifford Addams, *Venetian Fête Scene (San Giorgio: Nocturne, Venice)*, 1914. Etching, 6½ x 14 in. Private collection.

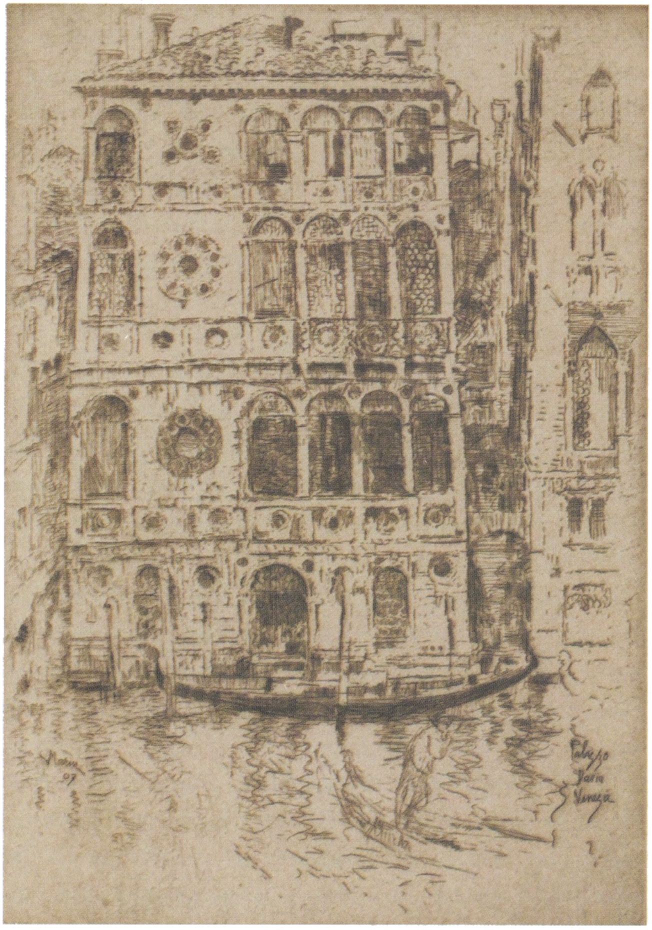


Fig. 5.62. John Marin, *Palazzo Dario*, 1907. Etching, 7½ x 5½ in. Private collection.

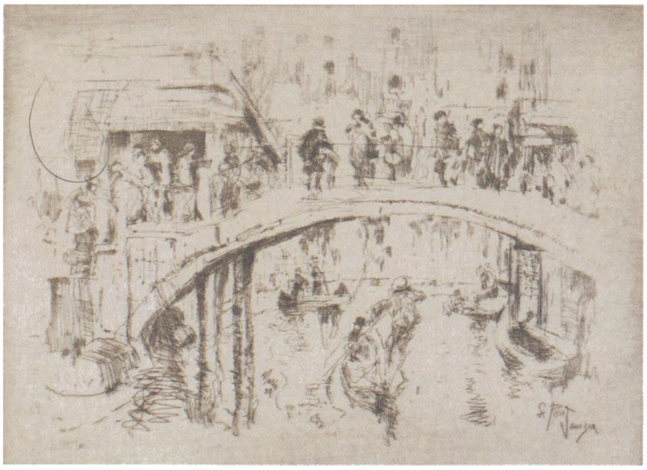


Fig. 5.63. John Marin, *Bridge, Venezia*, 1907. Etching, 5 x 7 in. Private collection.

Donald Shaw MacLaughlan (1876–1938) was considered, after Whistler, to be one of the greatest painter-etchers of the early twentieth century. He thought of himself as not just a follower of Whistler, but steeped in the master's artistic persona, even down to his insistence on grinding his own inks, printing his own limited editions, and searching out pieces of toned paper "from old manuscripts of the Renaissance (for the most part) which I have collected by endless searching though Italy and Europe."[55] *Canal, Venice*, 1908 (fig. 5.64), is an example of MacLaughlan's transition to a more quirky and freehand style from his first etchings, which were exquisite renderings of the picturesque in the tradition of the old master printmakers. The artist's fine draftsmanship is combined with an exuberant drypoint to create a scintillating rendering of a subject that in lesser hands had long become a dry formula, even in 1908. Fourteen years later, and after

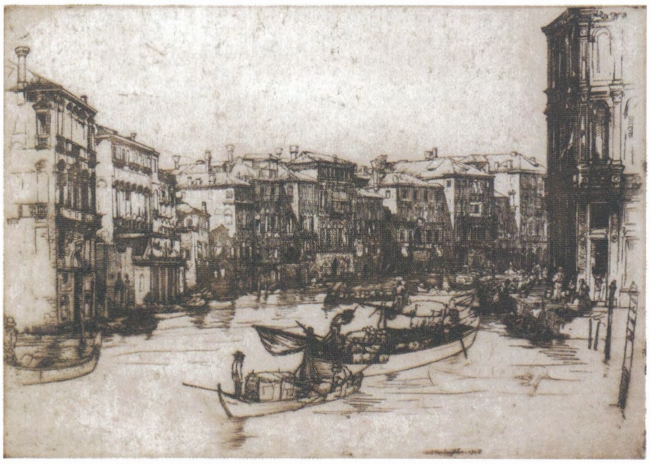


Fig. 5.64. Donald Shaw MacLaughlan, *Canal, Venice*, 1908. Etching, 10½ x 14¼ in. Private collection.

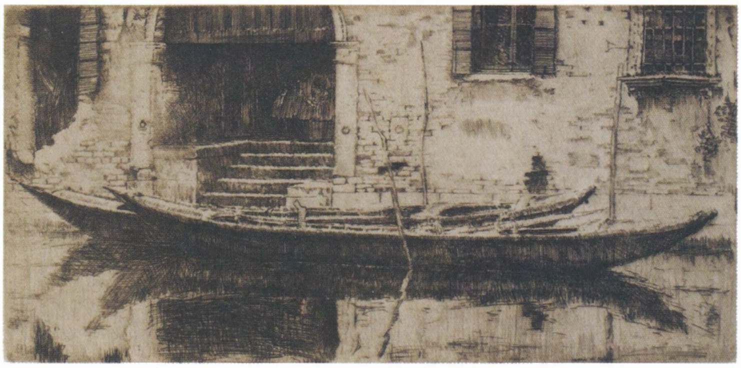


Fig. 5.66. Ernest David Roth, *Gondola and Doorway*, 1905. Etching, 9 x 4½ in. Private collection.

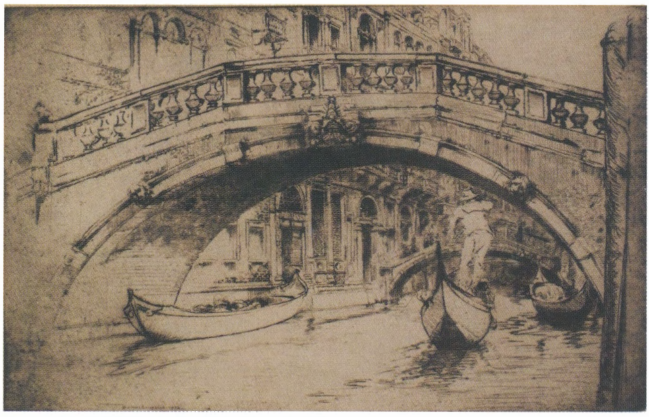


Fig. 5.65. Donald Shaw MacLaughlan, *Under Formosa's Bridge*, 1922. Etching, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

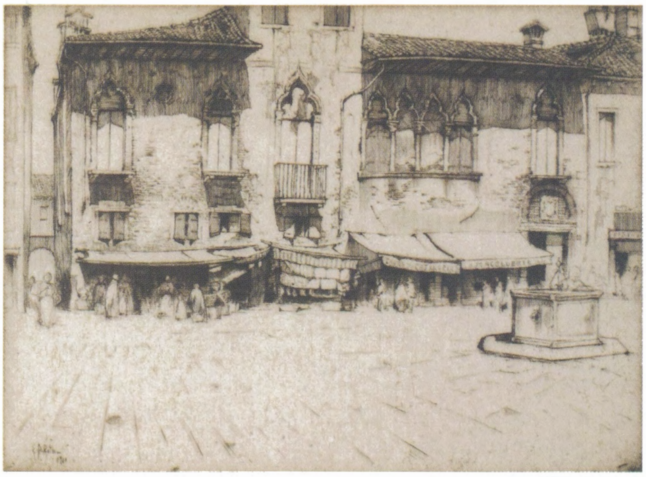


Fig. 5.67. Ernest David Roth, *Campo Santa Margherita*, 1906. Etching, 8 x 10¾ in. Private collection.

many more visits to Venice, he produced *Under Formosa's Bridge*, 1922 (fig. 5.65), which displays an even broader and more expressive interpretation of the lagoon city, full of rich shadows and a scattering of significant architectural detail, all adding a lyrical note. MacLaughlan was also a superb etcher of bucolic landscapes both in Europe and America.

Ernest David Roth (1879–1964), trained at the National Academy of Design, was completely engaged by Whistler's work early on, an influence fully visible in the work from his first visit to Venice in 1905. In *Gondola and Doorway*, 1905 (fig. 5.66), Roth has produced a work of great finesse and refinement, with vignettes of suspended time in which interior shadows and watery reflections tantalize the eye. *Campo Santa Margherita*, 1906 (fig. 5.67), shows Roth's dexterous ability to capture the rhythms of architecture by allowing the play of light and shadow to create wonderful surface rhythms, and with just enough sensuous hatched shading and jotted detail to give life and warmth to what otherwise might have been a rather hard-edged architectural rendering.

The lure of Venice, or Whistler's interpretation of it, resonated so deeply in the New England mind—Henry James and John Singer Sargent only added to the tradition of expatriate dreaminess—that it is little wonder it took American etchers some time to discover similar inspiration on their home shores, much less summon equal measures of finesse and enthusiasm. Although etching clubs abounded and then faded in the 1880s and 1890s, few landscapes of significant or lasting value were produced in America. The one great exception was Robert Swain Gifford, whose etchings of his boyhood stomping grounds on Naushon Island and nearby Buzzards Bay in Massachusetts capture a feeling for chiaroscuro and expressive natural form, as seen in *Near the Coast*, 1887 (fig. 5.69). Childe Hassam, J. Alden Weir, Charles Platt (see fig. 3.46), and John Henry Twachtman produced a few etched landscapes that resonate with wistful feeling, but nothing on the level or consistency of their best work in oil and watercolor. Charles Warren Eaton's excursion into landscape monotypes (see fig. 5.23) is a rare exception to the rule, and points to the great possibilities for Tonalist printmaking in the century to come. Another tantalizing avatar is found in a rare etching by Frederick W. Kost, *Sunset by the Sea*, 1890 (fig. 5.68), which captures an expansive sunset from the shoreline of his boyhood home on Staten Island. The extreme horizontal format and the delicate hatching and vibrant lines comprise the positive

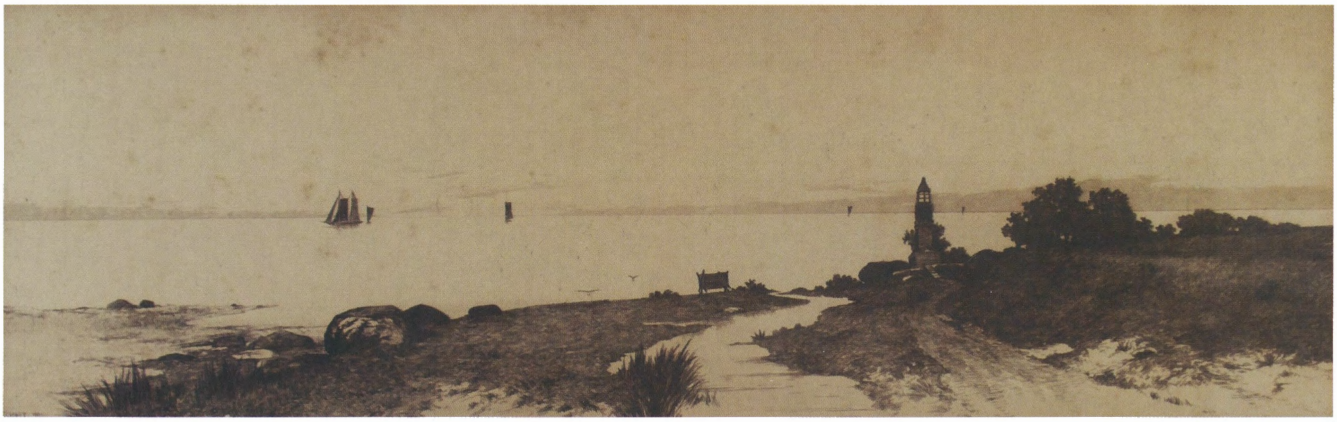


Fig. 5.68. Frederick W. Kost, *Sunset by the Sea*, 1890. Etching, 9½ x 31 in. Private collection.

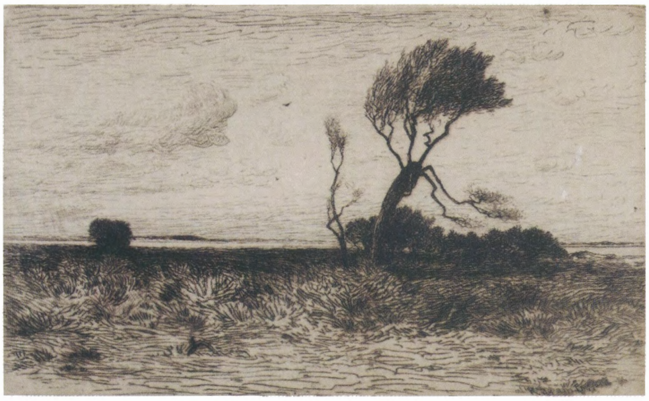


Fig. 5.69. Robert Swain Gifford, *Near the Coast*, 1887. Etching, 2½ x 4½ in. Private collection.

space of the landforms, with just a few touches to delimit the sea and horizon—the rest comprising the white reserve of the paper. Kost has managed to create a floating world on a tiny sea of paper, a microcosm of earth, sea, and sky as fragile and transitory as the ink marks that give it life.

The Growing Market for Tonalist Landscapes, Oils, Watercolors, and Pastels, and Their Impact on Figurative Artists

The boom in Tonalist watercolors, pastels, and etchings that occurred in tandem with the rise of the Tonalist landscape paintings in oil in the 1880s and early 1890s (a synergetic cross-fertilization that affected all mediums) was a development that, over time, began to profoundly affect even the most dyed-in-the-wool figure and genre painters among the foreign-trained artists, who dominated the early years of the Society of American Artists. As the first flush of interest in figurative art at the society began to wane in the early 1880s, even the figurative stalwarts began to adapt to changing market realities. The pressures to paint landscapes—artistic and financial, in addition to the drubbing of figurative artists from the likes of Charles de Kay—began to have an impact. As has been seen, institutional democratization and growing professionalism allowed the rise of Ameerican-trained landscape painters like Albert Pinkham Ryder and Ralph Albert Blakelock (the radical colorists promoted by Charles de Kay), J. Francis Murphy, Charles Warren Eaton, Charles Harry Eaton, and Leonard Ochtman—all following in the footsteps of George Inness. These artists were making a modest living from their landscape work. The market demand for landscape remained consistent, even through economic downturns, and was in turn abetted by the critical chorus of de Kay and the Gilder circle, who repeatedly stressed a native integrity over foreign technical dazzle as the essential basis of an emerging national style of landscape. All these factors promoted an artistic climate and market that boosted the prestige of the Tonalist landscape in the late 1880s to the detriment of the figurative artists. In addition, expatriate landscape Tonalists like Alexander and Birge Harrison, Arthur Hoeber, Dwight Tryon, and Charles Harold Davis began returning from Europe and in turn contributed their unique take on the Tonalist landscape (Alexander Harrison's marines would be widely exhibited in America). The period also saw the rise of a group of wealthy collectors, including Charles Lang Freer, Thomas B. Clarke, William T. Evans, and, later, George A. Hearn and John Gallatly, who began to actively buy and promote Tonalist landscapes (though they did not entirely neglect figurative work) as the American art par excellence. The cumulative impact of these various trends had a telling impact on the careers of figurative artists like William Merritt Chase, J. Alden Weir, and Thomas Dewing.

William Merritt Chase's Adoption of the Tonalist Landscape in the 1880s

After enduring much of the adverse criticism directed at the 1884 Society of American Artists' annual exhibition, William Merritt Chase (fig. 5.70) a consummate professional and practical artist, realized he had to adapt to changing times. Even Charles de Kay had lambasted Chase for trying to impress with size and "details, not on any remarkable sentiment,

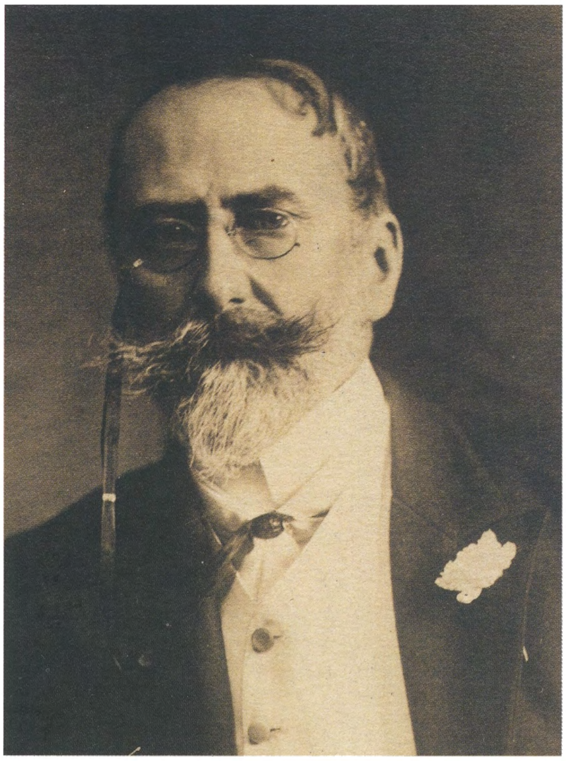


Fig. 5.70. Photograph of William Merritt Chase, c. 1900. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

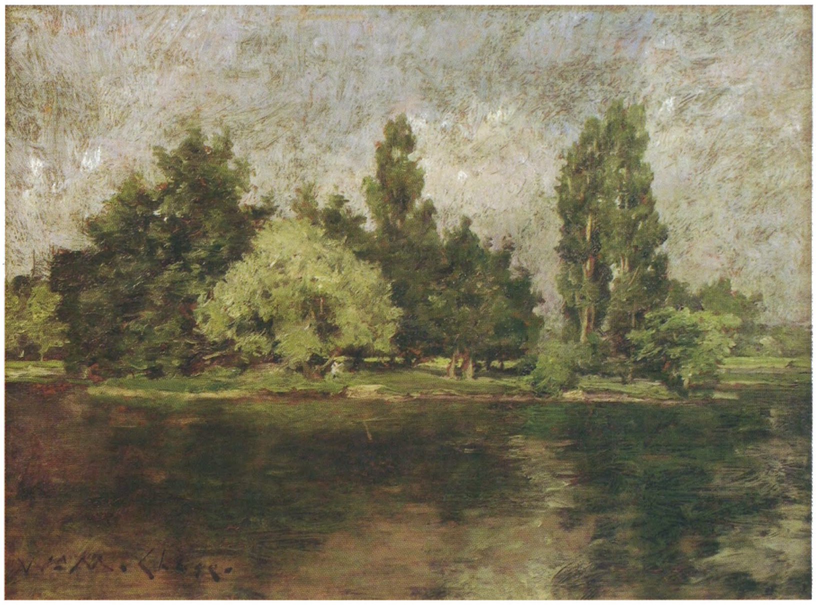


Fig. 5.71. William Merritt Chase, *Poplar Lake*, 1866. Oil on panel, 10 x 14 in. Courtesy Betty Krulik Fine Art Ltd.

grace of composition, or beauty of work."[56] As president of the society, Chase had been taken to task for his cosmopolitan style, bravura slapdash Munich-style facture, his esoteric and foreign subject matter, and for packing the exhibition with his like-minded students—criticized for European flair and polish to the detriment of American subjects and emotional sensibilities. Two years later, after the society had instituted its crucial reforms, which included an expanded selection jury of thirty, Chase embarked on new range of small-scale landscapes oils (his work in pastels had prepared the ground for these oils), many on wood panel, of a decidedly Whistlerian cast, which in subject and style he hoped would revive his reputation and establish a new market niche for his work. Chase, who had served on the selection jury of the society for years and taught at the Art Students League, had to be fully aware of the growing regard for the simple, unadorned American landscape: deceptively uncomplicaed, yet employing all the sophisticated Whistlerian devices of decorative patterning and formal arrangements of contiguous tonal form. Instead of traveling to Europe in 1886, as he had most summers, Chase remained in New York and began painting small scenes of Prospect Park in Brooklyn, Central Park in Manhattan, and various shoreline and river views around the city. Married and with a growing family, Chase became more attuned to the domestic and nearby scenery of his home turf—and he needed to sell more paintings. *Poplar Lake*, 1886 (fig. 5.71), demonstrates the facile touch and compositional brilliance Chase could bring to a near-at-home landscape. It is fundamentally Whistlerian in its spare sketchy style, limited tones, and use of the panel ground as a harmonizing element. The cadences, rhythms, and subtle decorative patterning of tree forms and amorphous lake reflections add a pleasing restful balance, characteristic of the Aesthetic Tonalism of the day. *Poplar Lake* is an exquisite example of an everyday scene, but executed with such consummate skill and perfectly placed grace notes as to touch on the wellsprings of the imagination. One has to believe that Chase was challenging his jingoistic critics: he had created an American scene, simple, blissful, and evocative but with an underlying formal sophistication that his mentor and friend, Whistler—as well as his society colleagues and students—would surely extol.

In bowing to the demands of the critics and the prevailing mood of boosterism for a native art, Chase may well have been responding to the admonitions of the Belgian painter Alfred Stevens (1823–1906), whose book of art advice was published in America in 1886. Chase knew Stevens well and admired his cosmopolitan beach and city scenes, and so the Belgian's thoughts might have struck a chord. "One should be of his own time, should be subject to the influence of the sun and of the country in which he lives and of his early education. Even a mediocre painter who has painted his own time will be more interesting in the future than the one who, with more talent, has painted an epoch that he has not seen."[57] In the eyes of critics and buyers, Chase's urban and suburban scenes brought him into the orbit of Inness, John La Farge, and the younger generation of Tonalist landscape painters, especially his small oil panels of river views in which the artist dematerializes the watery horizon to such a degree that at first glance the viewer is

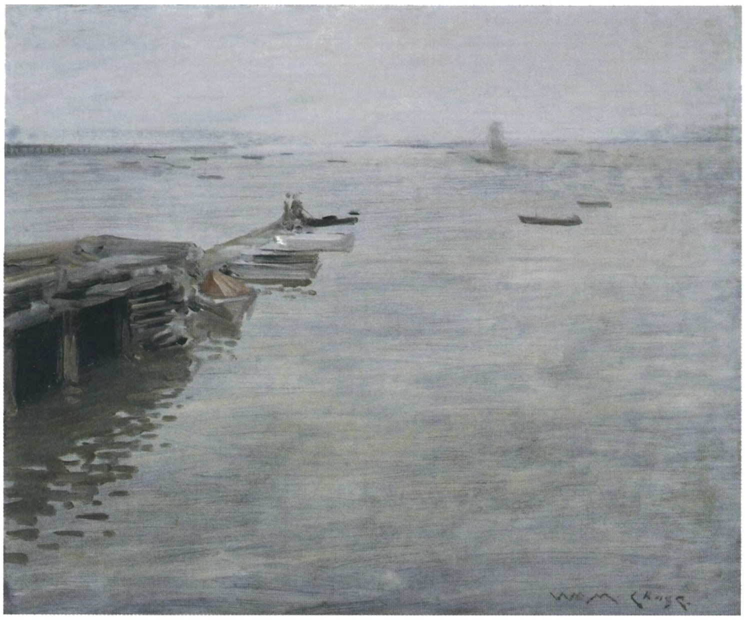


Fig. 5.72. William Merritt Chase, *Seashore* (originally, *A Gray Day)*, 1888. Oil on panel, 22 x 27 in. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph E. Mullen.

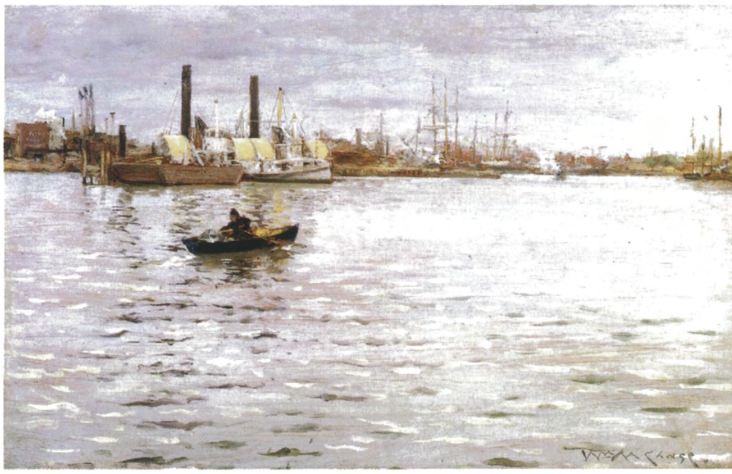


Fig. 5.73. William Merritt Chase, *East River*, c. 1886. Oil on panel, 10 x 15¾ in. Colby College Museum of Art, Lunder Collection.

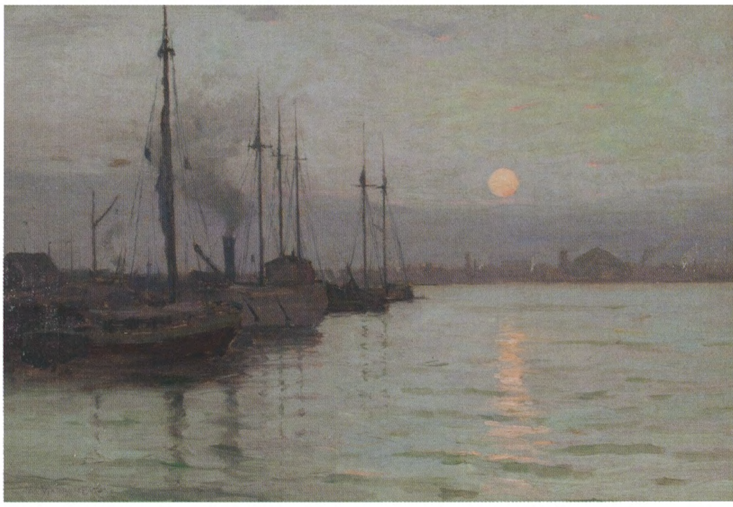


Fig. 5.74. Charles Warren Eaton, *Hackensack River*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Private collection.

immediately reminded of Whistler's Nocturnes and seascapes. *Seashore* (originally *A Gray Day)*, 1888 (fig. 5.72), displays a lusciousness of brushwork, subtle tonality, and breezy suggestiveness similar to what Whistler—and his sometime acolyte Oscar Wilde—had helped to make the vogue in America, even before such attributes were common in London and Paris. For a critic like de Kay, Chase's brushwork might have been a little too scintillating, his inclusion of figures and hinted narrative perhaps distracting, and possibly the artist lacked the soul of the purebred native landscape painter; nevertheless Chase established an original and viable market and found buyers for his delightful blend of landscapes suffused with the charms of the Aesthetic movement.

Comparing Chase's *East River*, circa 1886 (fig. 5.73), with Charles Warren Eaton's, *Hackensack River*, circa 1885 (fig. 5.74), of about the same time, suggests how the enormously talented Chase, steeped in European training, could draw close to the quintessential dreamy and soulful poetry of the young Eaton, barely out of Thomas Dewing's composition class at the Art Students League. It is very likely that Eaton knew and was influenced by Chase's work, if not Whistler's pastels and etchings; his early work illustrates how the younger American-trained artists and the foreign-trained sophisticates like Chase were merging along similar paths: all were drawn to parochial subject matter and acknowledged the prevailing market currents. Chase's deftly designed composition and flickering brushwork captures the blue-gray tonal envelope of late afternoon, balancing the overall harmonic play of color variations against delicate details of the boats moored along the quay, including a narrative moment with the rower in the middle ground. Eaton eschews almost all detail for a generalized effect of moonlight on the river and the docked ships; the mysterious diffused light and deliquescent shapes cast a spell, uniting subject and object, mood and reverie, into a single shimmering moment of perception. Chase might choose technical finesse over soul, narrative over emotion, but his lovely exaltation of the everyday taps into a vein of evanescent and scintillating beauty. The young Eaton embodied what can only be described as an innate love of and exhilaration in atmospheric effects that Chase, with all his technical wizardry, never quite equals—at least for much of the picture-buying public of the day. Eaton's *Evening on the Hudson*, circa 1886 (fig. 5.75), transfigures standard subject matter into a rhapsody on twilight reverie. It is a meditation on the ineffable quality of light reflected between sky and river at dusk; the shimmering pinks and blues in the sky, echoed in rich amorphous tonalities in the water, become the sole raison d'être of the work. Even the billowing smoke of passing ships and from shoreline

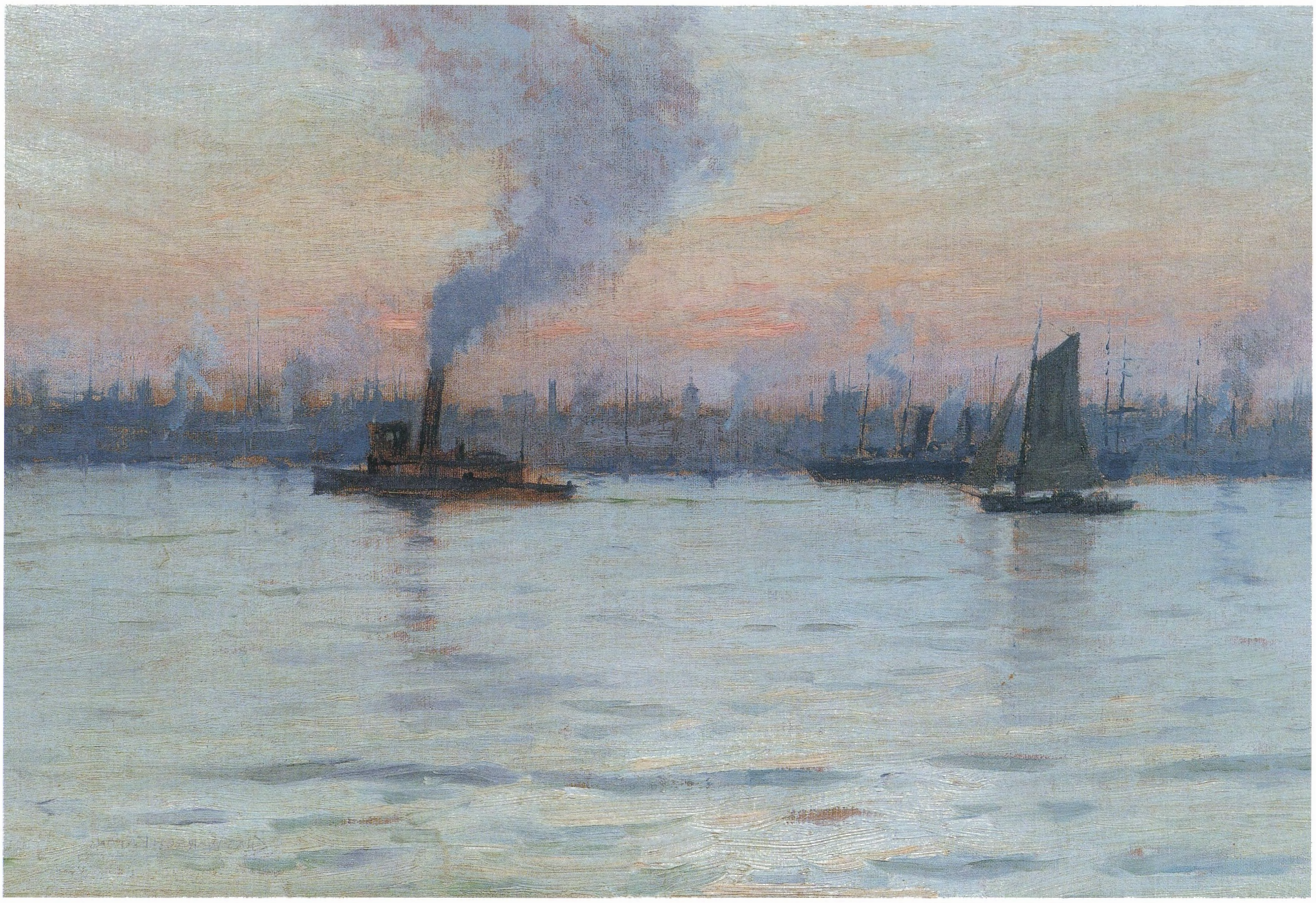


Fig. 5.75. Charles Warren Eaton, *Evening on the Hudson*, c. 1886. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Collection of Remak Ramsay.

chimneys is subsumed in blue haze to further the spell of the twilight hour.

Chase could paint expertly in a tonal style but seemed constitutionally inhibited in eliciting the deeper sentiments of the mode. Critics began praising Chase for not closing his eyes to the more prosaic subjects and quintessential experiences of daily life, which his prodigious talent made manifest with paint handling of subtlety and verve. Although some of Chase's subject matter in the artist's park scenes of 1886–90 suggests the juste milieu of the French Impressionists, he rarely employed the broken facture to achieve the scintillating light effects of classic Impressionism and assiduously maintained the integrity of form, preferring an even, muted light and blocked-in areas of color that retained structure and allowed for subtle patterning. Chase remained closer to Whistler and Degas than early Monet and Renoir—closer to the academic Tonalism of Velásquez (Chase could knock off an old master–style still life in his art school class demonstrations in an hour) and his Munich training.

By the time of the 1887 annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists, Chase's bright and cheerful paintings of Prospect Park were acknowledged successes by critics even if they lacked the brooding sentiment and veiled melancholy of some of the other landscape exhibitors like Homer Dodge Martin, whose *Behind the Sand Dunes*, described by Charles de Kay as having "exquisite tones in the distant field and poetical cloudwork . . . " More important, the Tonalist collector Thomas B. Clarke had bought one of Chase's Prospect Park landscapes and would buy more in time; inclusion in Clarke's collection was a solid imprimatur of success and potential investment value. Clarke would own eight works by Chase in 1899 when his collection was sold. (At Clarke's 1899 sale, Chase's work sold in the low hundreds while Inness, Homer, Wyant, and Martin sold in the thousands of dollars.) By 1890 when Chase gave up his New York scenes—he had moved his home base and family to Shinnecock, Long Island—his urban-suburban subjects were recognized as his signature style. His landscape work at Shinnecock gravitated to a bright Impressionist palette, more upscale and cosmopolitan than the raw rural poetry of J. Francis Murphy, Charles Melville Dewey, Bruce Crane, John Henry Twachtman, and other mainstream Tonalists. Nevertheless, his work was heralded for its contribution to raising the stature of the American scene in art, lending it a cachet once reserved for Holland, Brittany, or the suburbs of Paris. In 1888, Chase even exhibited his parkland scenes at the rival National Academy of Design, another indication of the growing reconciliation between the two institutions as both began to fill with Tonalist landscapes.

For all the sunny disposition of his finest pictures, Chase struggled with the critics and his public—never a favorite of either. In 1891 when Chase sold about seventy of his works at auction, de Kay tried to embrace Chase's achievement—an achievement he recognized but could never bring himself to love, calling Chase a "distinguished workman. He has, however, never developed a very definite, individual style of his own, but has made his mark by the deftness which he exhibits in the use of his brush. He is a natural painter and rightly enjoys the admiration of his fellows for the life and accuracy of his brushwork . . . Whistler and more recent apostles of broadness in painting have exercised so great an attraction that he has indulged in a style which is, perhaps, foreign to his best powers."[58] Noting some recent Whistlerian landscapes and seascapes, de Kay writes: "These are really reminiscences for paintings rather than pictures . . . but they have neither atmospheric quality nor scenery in sufficient force to give them a just reason for existence beyond the painter's atelier."[59] This lack of "atmospheric quality" or tonality, and the lack of "sufficient force" in terms of expressive and dynamic landscape forms—forms that balance and read dramatically at a distance—prevented Chase from achieving the kind of success accorded the synthetic landscapes of Inness and his many acolytes. Chase struggled to sell even his small exquisite landscapes, and often they brought disappointing sale results at auction, this when Inness and even a relative newcomer like Dwight Tryon were selling Tonalist landscapes for thousands of dollars to major collectors like Freer and Clarke. Nevertheless, Chase in the 1890s produced sumptuous large Tonalist landscapes, as well as Impressionist versions, of his home ground at Shinnecock, that are by any measure as accomplished and moving as those produced by his more specialized Tonalist colleagues. *A Shinnecock Vale*, circa 1895 (fig. 5.76), in its glorious display of lush green tones in the foreground and the wonderful gamut of grays, creams, and whites, creating a decorative medley of cloud patterns, exalts the full richness and imaginative quality of the Tonalist style at its best. Even so, Chase was never quite able to break into the high-end market for Tonalist landscapes—nor appeal to the major landscape buyers—and thus remained largely dependent on portraits and teaching.

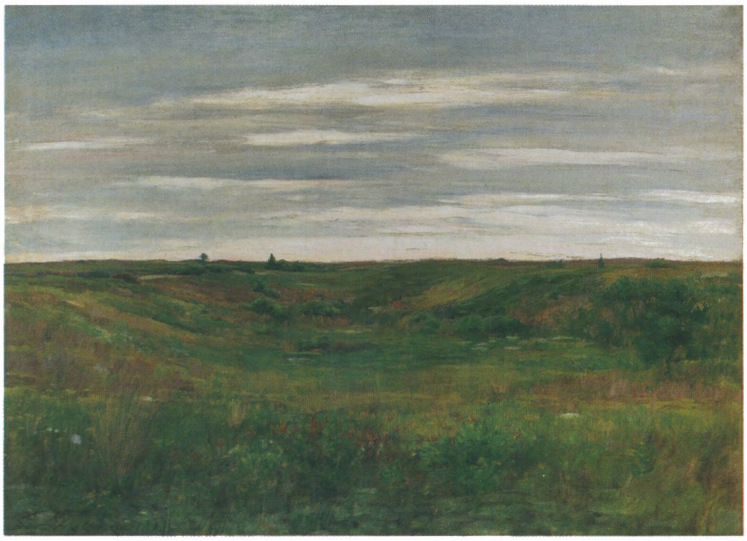


Fig. 5.76. William Merritt Chase, *A Shinnecock Vale*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 26 x 36 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

J. Alden Weir (1852–1919)

J. Alden Weir, like his friend William Merritt Chase, was a founding member of the Society of American Artists and trained to the highest academic standards at the École des Beaux-Arts. Weir, too, shifted from portrait and genre to more landscape work in the late 1880s. Along with Birge and Alexander Harrison, Weir (fig. 5.77) was one of the most important American expatriate acolytes of the French painter Jules Bastien-Lepage. During his student days in France in the mid-1870s, Weir's allegiance was such that he often chose to work with Bastien-Lepage and his French followers rather than his fellow Americans in Brittany. Bastien-Lepage's intensely focused naturalism, enhanced and dramatized by high horizons, and near photo-realist creation of a palpable envelope of atmospheric light remained lodestars of Weir's style throughout his career. Weir's dexterous and low-toned figurative and genre work made him a star in the first decade of the society and he filled many executive positions, including the presidency in 1882. De Kay was thrilled with Weir's appearance in the opening exhibition of the society in 1878, praising the artist's portrait work for its sketchy, broadly painted quality and "harmonious coloring . . . subdued, and . . . a tendency to the grays found in so much of the French work."[60] In addition to subtle tonality, de Kay admired Weir's ability to retain the vigor of the premier coup in a finished work and predicted great things for the young artist. Over time, de Kay became somewhat frustrated by Weir's early figurative work, acknowledging his technical skill but often quibbling. In an 1882 Society exhibition, de Kay had the gall to offer advice to Weir about a portrait: "It is slightly wanting in tone, and will need setting aside and refurbishing six months hence to bring it to harmony."[61] As with so many figurative artists, de Kay kept pushing Weir to realize his promise and find an original American interpretation and to put behind him the tired genres of European extraction.

Weir was a founding member of the Society of Painters in Pastel and clearly found the intimate medium and its aesthetics congenial. After 1885 he taught regularly at the Art Students League, an indication that his figurative and still-life art was wanting in sales. Throughout the 1880s Weir maintained the refined academic style of his Parisian training in his still lifes and figurative works, displaying careful draftsmanship and cool tonal transitions; only toward the end of the decade did

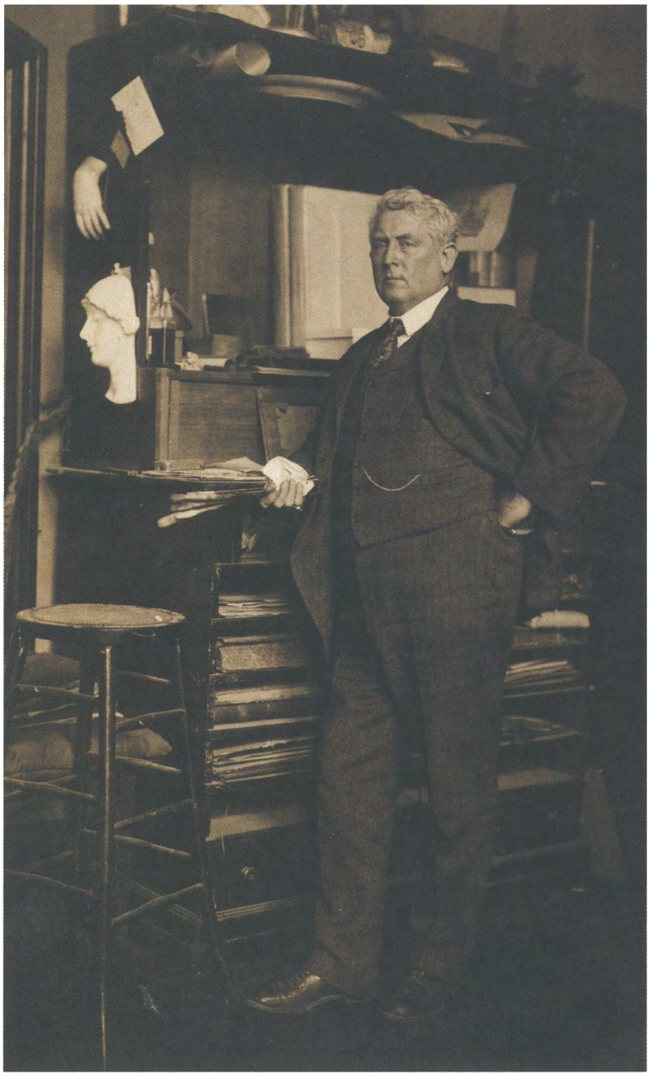


Fig. 5.77. J. Alden Weir, photographed c. 1910 by Peter A. Juley & Son. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1868, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

his style become looser and his contours less firm, especially in his few small landscapes, which have the sketch-like unfinished look of studies. Here too, his work in watercolor and pastel may have set the stage for his later landscape work. Although he was friends with Albert Pinkham Ryder, Geroge Inness, William Lathrop, John Henry Twachtman, and other Tonalist landscape painters who often spent time at his Branchville farm in Connecticut, it was not until around 1887 that Weir began to pay serious attention to landscape, probably spurred on by the example of his fellow artists who not only indulged in his hospitality but also began painting landscapes at his farm.

Weir's late 1880s landscapes were small, informal, and low-toned, reflecting the muted light and overcast weather of autumn, winter, and early spring (the kind of gray atmospheric conditions that approximated the light the artist had known in his student years painting in Europe under the influence of Bastien-Lepage). *Lengthening Shadows*, 1887 (fig. 5.78), became the model for most of Weir's landscapes over the following three decades. Bastien-Lepage's high horizon allows Weir to pile up a dazzling array of variegated green tones across the shadowed hillside of his farm—a farm that appears in the Tonalist landscapes of Twachtman, Ryder (see Ryder's *Weir's Orchard*, fig. 4.51), and Lathrop's *Trees on a Hillside* (see fig. 5.28). Meticulously executed decorative patterns lead the eye in rising diagonals, beginning with the foreground log, to the newly planted trees along the dirt road, the stone wall, and upward to the ridge line and a display of leafy trees against the fading sky. Weir's academic finesse and strong contours are still apparent but the overall feeling has been softened and the vibrancy of the greens casts a spell of telling poignancy. In *Lengthening Shadows* Weir seems to have gained a refreshing connection with his subject matter, a vivifying emotional earnestness that characterizes so much of early 1880s Tonalism. The success of *Lengthening Shadows* is attested to by the fact that it was purchased by the Tonalist collector William T. Evans (who was also buying landscapes by Twachtman at this time) and loaned for inclusion in the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889. The work became something of a template for Weir's landscape style; he painted many variations on this hillside farm, often using the high horizon to decorative effect, building up his forms in schematic arrangements, cropping the composition, and pushing his color shapes to the surface plane.

By 1890 and 1891, Weir was painting and exhibiting more and more landscapes, often with his friend Twachtman (*Artist's Home in Autumn, Greenwich, Connecticut*, circa 1895, fig. 5.79), and his style displays much of the nuance, breezy freedom, and simplicity of his fellow artist. At the same time, a growing enthusiasm for decorative touches and calculated informality was making its way into his bucolic pastels and watercolors. It was a style and subject that caught de Kay's eye in an 1892 society exhibition: "One of the most delightful landscapes here is J. Alden Weir's "The Lane," a true Connecticut countryside with inconspicuous farmhouse and snake fence."[62]

By the 1890s, when Aesthetic Tonalism had reached its zenith and the Society of American Artists was bestowing the Webb Prize on the likes of Twachtman, Dwight Tryon, and J. Francis Murphy, Weir almost completely abandoned still lifes to concentrate on landscape. Writing to his brother in 1891, Weir acknowledged that his turn to landscape in recent exhibitions represented something of a new outlook in his work. "Traditions are good things and interesting, but are not these things so much instilled in me that instead of the character and aspect interesting me most, I was hampered by trying to render the things I did not see and unable to get at the things that really existed."[63] This admission—more like a confession—speaks directly to the conundrum of so many American artists of the day, especially those who had returned from Europe with years of strict academic training under their belt: the figurative tradition had little relevance either

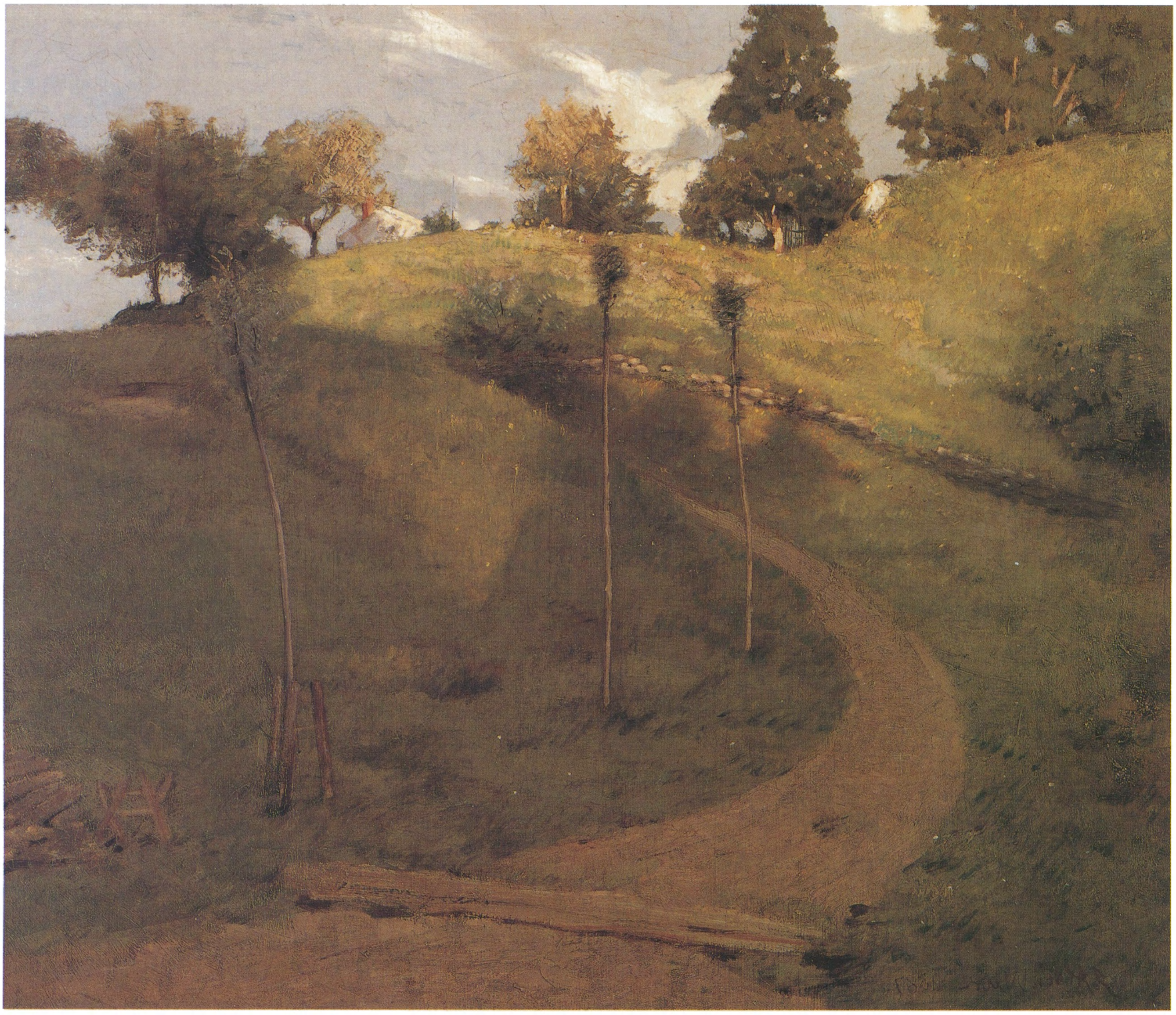


Fig. 5.78. J. Alden Weir, *Lengthening Shadows*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 20 x 25 in. Private collection, Springfield, MA.

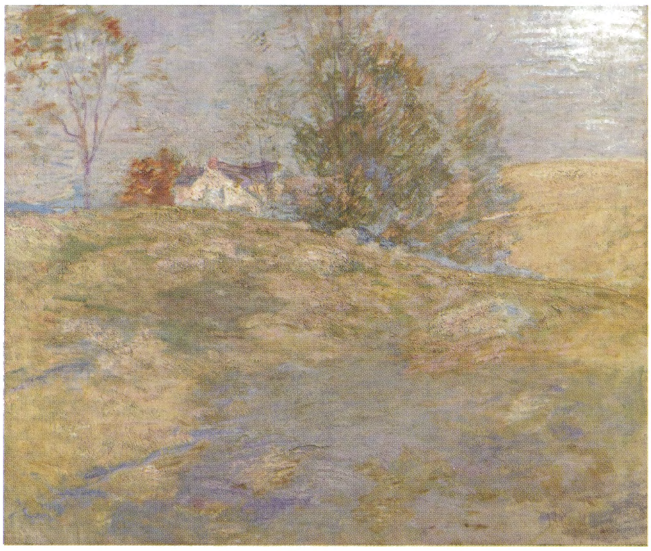


Fig. 5.79. John Henry Twachtman, *Artist's Home in Autumn, Greenwich, Connecticut*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 25¼ x 30¼ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

to the American art market or to the artist's natural affinity for landscape. This deep response to landscape, what the art historian Kenneth Clark has simply called "love," has been the prime motivation of the landscapist since the genre first took shape in the fifteenth century. As Clark has written: "Facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and, in landscape, this all embracing love is expressed by light.... For in such small images [fifteenth-century manuscript illuminations] a unity of tone is more easily achieved, and the whole scene can be given the concentrated brilliance of a reflected crystal."[64] Clark's observation suggests why much of early Aesthetic Tonalism developed around the small-scale oil, pastel, or watercolor, and why the break with realism produced an art that gravitated toward decoration and symbol. "The less an artifact interests our eye as imitation, the more it must delight our eye as pattern, and an art of symbols always evolves a language of decoration.... More important

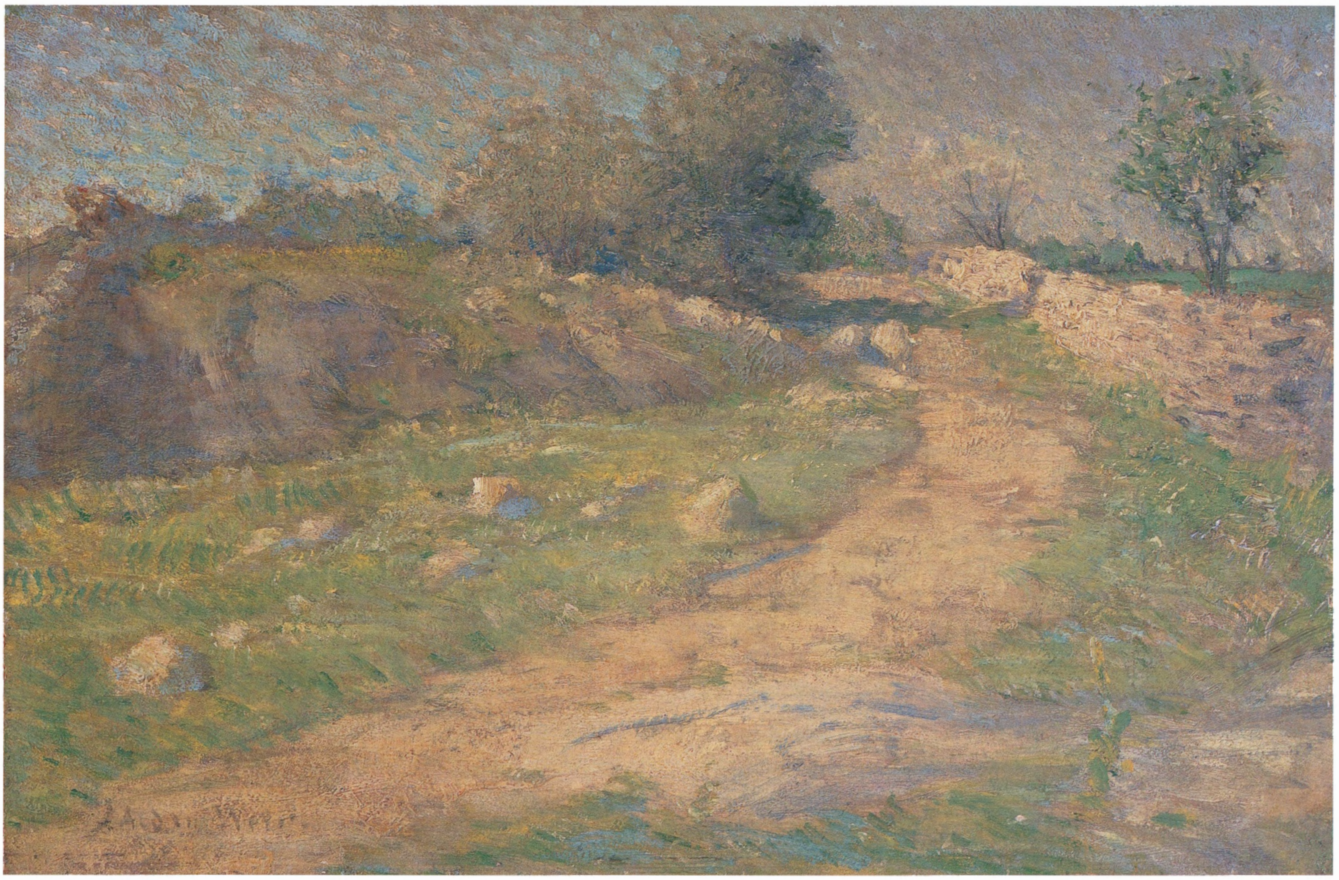


Fig. 5.80. J. Alden Weir, *The Lane*, c. 1890. Oil on wood panel, 10¼ x 15¼ in. Acquired 1920, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

still, as soon as men look with pleasure at the actual details of nature, the symbolizing habit of mind gives to their regard an unusual intensity; for they look at flowers and trees not only as delightful objects, but as prototypes of the divine."[65] What "really existed"—as the artist put it—for Weir was his family farm, the contours of the land, the shapes and patterns of the trees, which he and his family loved, and the spirit of his native ground in Branchville. Similar inspiration had been found by Inness and Eaton in Montclair, New Jersey; by Murphy in Arkville, in New York's Catskills; by Robert Swain Gifford along the coastline of Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts; and by Tryon in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts. All without exception developed a personal symbology around home ground: Inness with his hazy meadow reaches, Eaton with his stands of white pine, Murphy with his spindly tree jottings, Gifford with his windblown cedars, and Tryon with his mysterious tree lines. It is almost impossible to think of a major Tonalist who did not draw inspiration and "a symbolizing habit of mind" from a close attachment to place—homesteads, summer homes, and native ground—near and dear to their hearts. Weir was no exception. Critical approval and sales of his landscape work in the early 1890s could only have confirmed Weir on the new path closest to his heart.

The Lane, circa 1890 (fig. 5.80), the landscape Charles de Kay described as "delightful," demonstrates the limit of Weir's exploration of the Impressionist style—near its apogee of influence in America in the early 1890s—in terms of bright, broad daylight and a low degree of broken chromaticism. But even here the underlying armature of the landscape is kept intact and decorative patterns of form employed as ornamentation—rocky outcroppings and stone walls—are emphasized by the overall tonal harmony. Although Weir and Twachtman are often described as Impressionists, only rarely did they give themselves over to the broken facture and primary colors of classic French Impressionism of the late 1870s. Americans, even Impressionist painters like Theodore Robinson, seemed uneasy about relinquishing structure and definition of form in their landscapes, either because the concrete and permanent in nature remained fundamental to their sense of meaning, or because a diffuse Impressionist rendering simply dissipated the compositional energy and the feasibility of decorative patterning and symbolic form. The Americans cared less for ocular science, and light as light, and more for the poetry of subdued tonalities and expressive deployment of broad detail—detail that morphed into paint marks approaching a calligraphic symbology. As Kenneth Clark has noted of Impressionism, "Looking back over sixty years, it may seem that this (the Impressionists) confidence in the physical world was a fundamental weakness. Art is concerned with our whole being—our knowledge, our memories, our associations. To

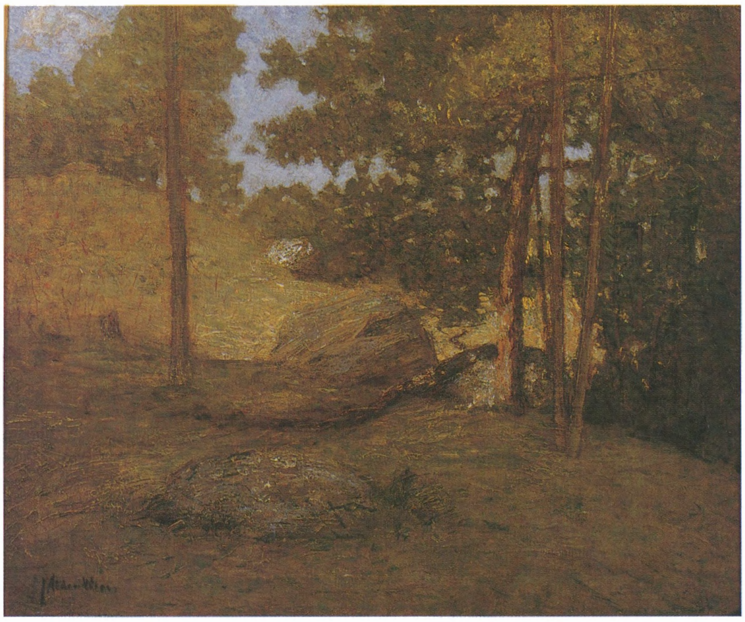


Fig. 5.81. J. Alden Weir, *New England Meadow*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 30 x 25 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

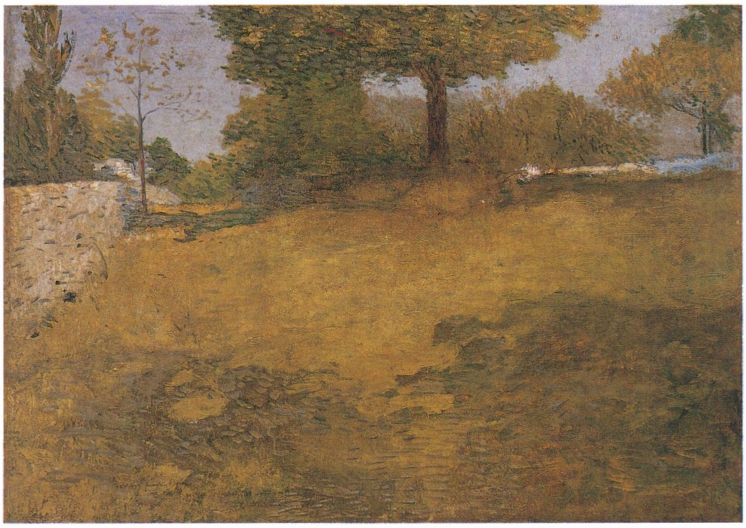


Fig. 5.82. J. Alden Weir, *The High Pasture*, 1899–1902. Oil on canvas, 24⅛ x 33½ in. Acquired 1920, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

confine painting to purely visual sensations is to touch only the surface of our spirits. . . . The supreme creation of art is the compelling image. An image is a 'thing,' and impressionism aimed at abolishing things. And in painting, the simplest and most enduring images are things with lines round them; and impressionism abolished line. This is only a way of saying in pictorial terms that impressionism did not address itself to the imagination."[66] Clark's summation precisely elucidates the dilemma of so many American artists of the 1890s, like Weir and Twachtman, who experimented with Impressionist facture but found it wanting; they needed the thingness of life, the symbolic structure, as well as the imaginative mystery behind nature. This is why Inness abhorred Impressionism, why Theodore Robinson felt frustrated with the style, and why Childe Hassam disappoints in so much of his late work. Weir, too, remained attuned to the spiritual quality of landscape, as espoused by his mentor, Bastien-Lepage, and thus maintained an allegiance to the formal components in his art. Also, his interest in Asian art and the use of decorative two-dimensional patterning only added scope and interest to his art, to which classic Impressionism contributed something in the way of paint handling but little else.

New England Meadow, circa 1900 (fig. 5.81), displays Weir's fascination with the fundamentals of his Branchville world, the rocky outcropping, the stands of trees, the up-and-down wavelike action of the hilly earth—here flattened into engaging patterns that speak both a decorative and symbolic language. The artist's trees and boulders loom in the foreground with a kind of animist presence. Weir's strongest landscapes maintain a tensile balance between an orchestrated richness of tonality in the middle range and architectonic detailing that unifies and strengthens the carrying power of the image. *The High Pasture*, 1899–1902 (fig. 5.82), retains Bastien-Lepage's high horizon, shifting the foreground to the picture plane where a flurry of decorative, stitch-like brushwork hints at rocky ground. In the 1890s, J. Francis Murphy, though employing a more conventional structure than Weir in his landscapes, also indulged in decorative impasto surfaces in his foregrounds to add life and interest. Weir's Branchville farm served the same function as Monet's beloved Giverny: an artist's home ground where every glance, every turning, each scintillating moment brings its own peculiar rewards. Duncan Phillips, who collected Weir's work and was a close friend of the artist, noticed Weir's imaginative bond to his Branchville home, the way in which the artist "could suddenly become absorbed and fascinated by the momentary effect of a long familiar and unremarkable scene. I am thinking of what Weir found so paintable in the mere corner of a high pasture, just a bit of sunshine playing along a stone wall and over a well-worn foot path, and a silvery, green tree outspread against a warm blue sky. The design of the picture I discovered later to be original and delightful, but my first pleasure was that of recognition."[67]

By 1908–1909, in *Afternoon by the Pond* (fig. 5.83), Weir had evolved a broader more powerful approach to the Tonalist landscape. Like many of the Tonalist colleagues, Weir had moved beyond his earlier Aesthetic Tonalism to a more Expressive Tonalism, employing the full range of modernist devices—including the freedom of Impressionist facture—with sumptuous surface impastos laid in with palette knife, a raised foreground and scrim of trees that turns the picture plane into an activated surface of decorative patterning. The shift from intimate aesthetics to broader more expressive surfaces only adds to the emotional quality and a more energized feeling for symbol, especially in the juxtaposition of dappled light and darker silhouetted trees. *Afternoon by the Pond* points

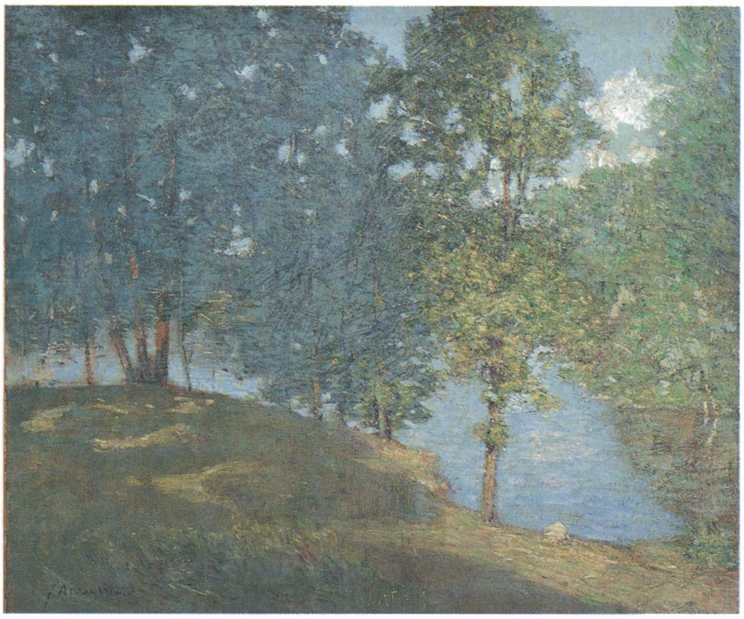


Fig. 5.83. J. Alden Weir, *Afternoon by the Pond*, 1908–1909. Oil on canvas, 25⅛ x 30 in. Acquired 1921, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

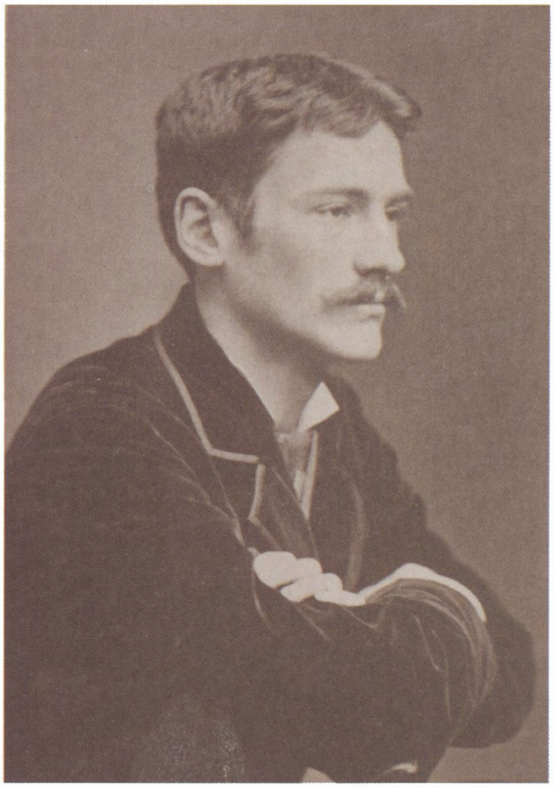


Fig. 5.84. Photograph of Thomas Dewing, c. 1880–1890. Charles Lang Freer Papers. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Gift of the Estate of Charles Lang Freer.

toward Post-Impressionism and Monet's late tonal paintings of lily pads and their endlessly modulating patterns created by forms melting, disappearing, and reforming in vibrant masses of color—the mysterious intersection of the seen and unseen. As will be seen in chapter 8, Weir's inclusion along with Inness, Fuller, Ryder, Twachtman, Lathrop, and other important Tonalists in Duncan Phillips's collection is an indication of how highly this progressive-minded collector ranked their contribution to the mainstream of modern American Art.

Thomas Dewing (1851-1893), and the Aesthetic Landscape—"Where a Few Choice Spirits Live"

Thomas Dewing (fig. 5.84), another early stalwart of the Society of American Artists and talented decorative figure painter, employed the Tonalist mode in its most sumptuous Whistlerian embodiment to espouse notions of "high art" among sophisticated artistic circles from the 1880s through the 1920s. Fundamentally a figurative artist, Dewing, too, succumbed to the lure and financial rewards of landscape work in the 1890s. Dewing's landscapes, though few in number, combine a scintillating display of surface textures with an abiding inspiration from the landscapes of Cornish, New Hampshire, where Dewing and his wife, the painter Maria Oakley, spent their summers before the turn of the century. At his very best, Dewing's Tonalist landscapes and figurative works of tall, elegant women constitute some of the finest examples of pure painting in the period, an art in which the ostensible subject has been transformed into aesthetic artifact: mysterious, haunting, ambiguous, and by virtue of both shedding narrative and inviting it, beguiling the viewer with an abstract beauty that is, ultimately, unknowable. Dewing and his fellow Tonalist, Dwight Tryon, were both patronized and employed by the collector Charles Lang Freer, who, by the 1890s, was near-obsessed with Whistler, in time assembling the greatest Whistler collection in the world. Dewing made a career out of his Tonalist renditions of ethereal women in spare interior settings who embodied, at least in the popular press and for the celebrity culture of the day, the finest attributes of American womanhood: purity, wholesomeness, refinement, cool intelligence and charm, and a certain transcendent Emersonian longing for spiritual grace and high-minded pursuits—so admired by newly minted gentlemen of the Gilded Age. In Dewing, Tonalism breathed the most refined aspirations of the upwardly mobile.

After only a year at the Académie Julian in Paris under Jules-Joseph Lefebvre, who specialized in women in exotic dress, Dewing returned to his hometown of Boston, but quickly moved on to New York—his "center of living art"—in 1880 where he became an intimate of the Gilder circle. Dewing gained entry to those exalted lights though his marriage to the enormously talented painter of Tonalist floral still lifes and genre, Maria Oakley, a close friend of Helena de Kay Gilder, Charles de Kay's sister. Maria was older than Dewing and had a more distinguished art education; she had studied at The Cooper Union and in Paris with Thomas Couture, and then with William Morris Hunt and John La Farge. Besides being an extraordinary talent, she was well read and deeply enamored of the writings of Emerson and other thinkers like Herbert Spencer, Walter Pater, and Matthew Arnold. Maria may well have influenced Dewing's early imaginative works, with their kinship in subject and look to the Pre-Raphaelites; she is known to have contributed to the painting of floral backgrounds in some of Dewing's work, and her conceptual input may have been wider than either artist let on. Though technically strong and beautiful, Dewing's early work was dismissed by the New York critics. In an 1882 review of the Society of American Artists' annual exhibition, De Kay wrote, "Mr. T. W. Dewing is gaining ground slowly, though he leaves much to be desired. A little 'Two Portraits' may be better termed caricature, since it does not present good characteristics, but seems to select inferior."[68] As he had with Chase and Weir and so many figurative artists, de Kay constantly poked holes in the pretentious or tendentious imagery of Dewing's genre work, often praising some technical aspect of a painting but ridiculing the overall concept. In a review of a genre piece, *Tobit and the Angel*, in the society's annual exhibition of 1887, which de Kay called a "landscape with charming tones," the critic proceeded to sarcasm in his comments on the story as well as the title. "It is delightful in color, the landscape is bare but pleasing, and the scene raises questions which poor Tobit and his apocryphal history can never satisfy. Surely the name was an after-thought; it fits the picture about as well as the great gull's wings, delightfully painted, fit the so-called angel."[69] De Kay went on to praise a Dewing portrait, suggesting the artist paint less out of his imagination and more of the quotidian reality of American life. Another Gilder circle confederate, Clarence Cook of the *New York Tribune*, scorned another Dewing genre piece, *The Days*, at the annual exhibition of the National Academy of Design in 1887, calling it derivative, its hues sickly, and the female figures "the most forlorn, drooping and vapid type that were ever imagined by the English Pre-Raphaelites at their worst."[70] Such crushing criticism from art world cognoscenti, intimates of the Gilder circle no less, pushed Dewing, as it had other figurative artists, to adjust his subject and style, eschewing direct influence from foreign sources for a more individual, if not American, artistic profile, a homegrown brew of imagery that might draw on tradition but was neither servile nor aping trite European models.

By the late 1880s, Dewing must have been well aware of the changing market for American art, as many of his colleagues, especially Dwight Tryon who won the Webb Prize for landscape at the Society of American Artists' annual exhibition in 1889, had opted for the more remunerative Tonalist landscape. And like Tryon, Dewing adopted Whistler's artistic strategies and made them thoroughly his own, turning Whistler's monochromatic palette and decorative patterning to his own Transcendentalist concepts of what constituted high art. The plan he carried out was to thoroughly Americanize his subjects and strip them to their bare essentials, depicting his wraithlike, blue-blooded, fine-boned models in a minimalist landscape setting. Then, by veiling his compositions in misty ambiguous and abstract tonalities, he attempted an approximation in visual form of the rarefied subjectivity espoused in the writing of Emerson and Thoreau. These Transcendentalist poets were practically the patron saints of the Gilder circle—even more so, of the summer artists' colony at Cornish, New Hampshire. Maria Oakley, who lived and breathed Emerson and Thoreau, practically admitted near the end of her life that her husband's figurative landscapes were the very thing she wished she had painted. ". . . I dreamed of groups & figures in big landscapes & still I see them."[71] In such paintings as Dewing's *The Hermit Thrush*, circa 1890 (fig. 5.85), the literary insights, which Maria Oakley cherished, and the ravishing landscapes of the Cornish art colony found a profound and exquisite painterly expression. Such iconic renderings of tall, long-necked maidens in twilit fields have been enlisted by critics and historians from the 1890s to the present to explain the social and cultural milieu of which they were seemingly an expression. Some have read into Dewing's work a range of ideas about the intuitive feminine mystique embodied in Henry James's heroines, or an early Boston Brahmin feminist high-mindedness, not to mention the spiritual insights into man's nature expoused by Emerson. Dewing, however, snorted at his critics and interpreters, as well as at attempts to foist narrative explanations on his art. Nevertheless, his closest friends and clients—the collector Charles Lang Freer and the architect and aesthete (and womanizer) Stanford White being the most prominent—certainly relished his work for the insider associations with his models, though they genuinely embraced his abstracting talent for richly painted surfaces and suggestive arrangements of form and color.

Dewing had great confidence in his abilities as a craftsman and handler of paint—the thing that mattered most to him and his colleagues. For all his talent (and critics like de Kay finally did acknowledge his originality), Dewing was always dependent on his social connections and his rich patrons for sales, men like Freer and later the collector John Gellatly who shared his aspirations, socially and artistically. Dewing often disparaged the critics and the public, forever needy of narrative associations to make his art intelligible; he was convinced that his art could only be enjoyed and understood in its own terms, and was loath to lend his paintings, convinced they would be lost in large exhibitions. He prided himself on his exalted art and his excursions into the realms of ideal beauty, as he described it, "the poetic and imaginative world where a few choice spirits live."[72]

The Hermit Thrush is an extraordinary hybrid of Aesthetic Tonalism and Expressive Tonalism, the closest Dewing came

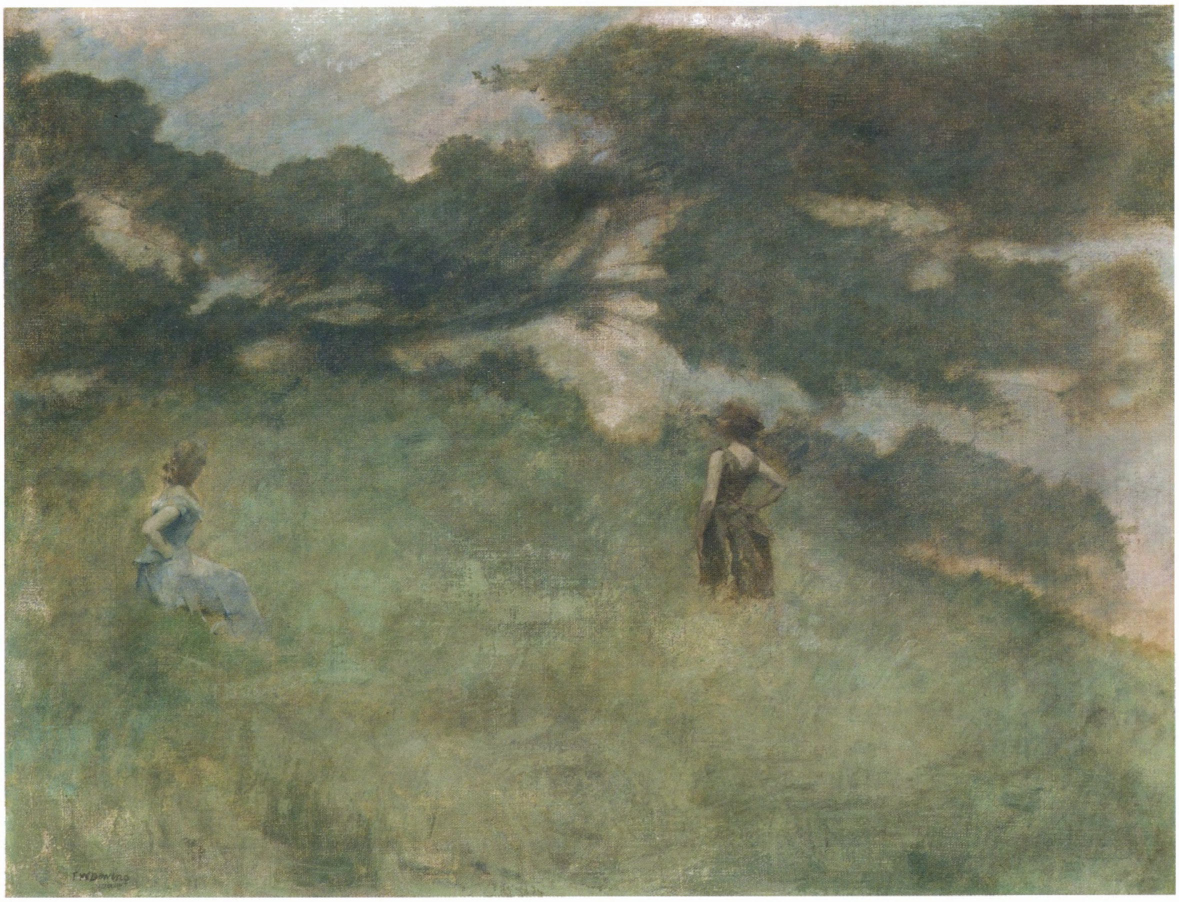


Fig. 5.85. Thomas Dewing, *The Hermit Thrush*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, mounted on board, 34 x 46⅛ in. National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Gift of John Gellatly.

to developing his own brand of natural symbology within a decorative context. A gigantic white pine looms over the meadow hillside, a presence out of which the bewitching song of the thrush merges with the incipient twilight. The thin weave of the canvas allows the layers of green pigments to be absorbed, the various tonalities merging or remaining saturated or lying in shallow veils of delicate impasto. It is, in a very tactile sense, a painting about surfaces, about ideas so deeply embodied in images that they touch on the symbolic, about the intermingling of painting and song, art and nature, in which the human element intrudes only as a distant afterthought. The two women in evening costume have their faces turned from the viewer, absorbed in listening for the song of the thrush—viewers, too, of the majestic white pine, a particularly fine example of which was revered in the Cornish colony in the years when Dewing and Maria Oakley summered there. Thoreau, in his journal, comes closest to explicating the transcendentalist spirit of Dewing's art: "The wood thrush's is not opera music; it is not so much the composition as the strain, the tone—cool bars of melody from the atmosphere of everlasting morning or evening. It is the quality of the song, not the sequence . . . there is the liquid coolness of things that are just drawn from the bottom of springs. The thrush alone declares the immortal wealth and vigor that is in the forest. Whenever a man hears it, he is young, and Nature is in her spring. Wherever he hears it, it is a new world and a free country, and the gates of heaven are not shut against him . . . this bird never fails to speak to me out of an ether purer than that I breathe, of immortal beauty and vigor. He deepens the significance of all things seen in the light of his strain. He sings to make men take higher and truer views of things. . . ."[73]

This also might describe the aesthetic aspiration of the Cornish art colony. Talent and brains, culture and hard work—and the refinements of the spirit, not social standing—were the important qualities to the denizens of Cornish, where Dewing's art was recognized as engendering a transcendent experience of nature: uplifting and vivifying. Dewing considered *The Hermit Thrush* primarily a "decoration" and a talismanic work embodying deep underlying emotions. It was also a picture he was reluctant to part with, and he only did so for a princely sum somewhere in the range of $3,000 to $5,000 to the Tonalist collector John Gellatly.[74] It is surprising that given the market for his figurative landscapes, Dewing painted only twelve in all; Freer, Gellatly, Clarke, Evans, and other collectors around 1900 were snapping up landscapes by Inness, Wyant, Martin, and Dewing's good friend, Dwight Tryon, for huge prices.

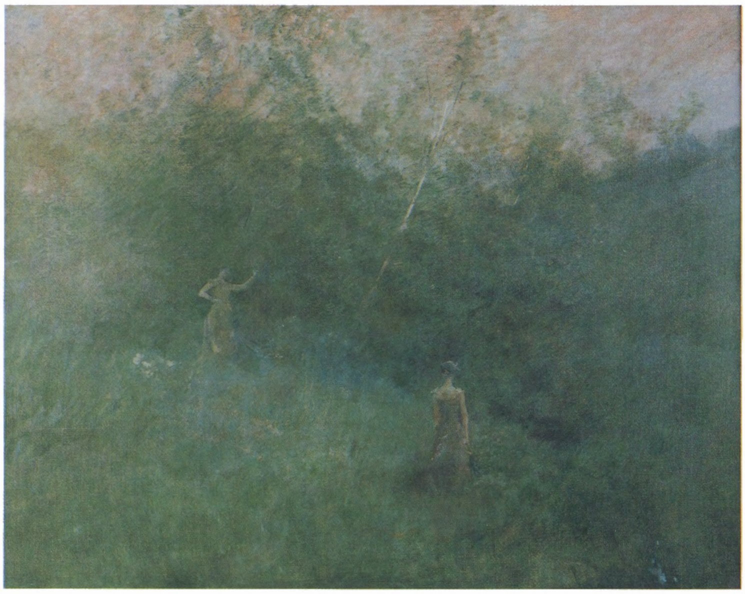


Fig. 5.86. Thomas Dewing, *The White Birch*, 1896–99. Oil on canvas, 42½ x 53⅞ in. The Manoogian Collection.

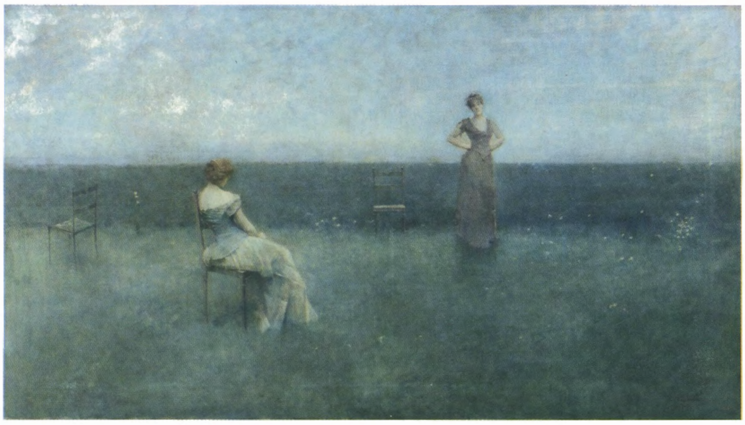


Fig. 5.87. Thomas Dewing, *The Recitation*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 30 x 55 in. Detroit Museum of Art Purchase, Picture Fund.

Dewing's oil *The White Birch*, 1896–99 (fig. 5.86), also derives its elegant and refined spirit from the Olympian enclave of Cornish. A single slender white birch becomes the focal point amid a sylvan setting of meadows and panoply of darker green tones—perhaps summer hemlocks and oaks. Dewing's swan-necked society doyennes with their attributes of rare intelligence and cultivated spirituality, perhaps mirroring the ideal of Henry James's New England breed of opinionated women, seem almost an afterthought as their dematerialized figures fade into the twilight. Their very indefiniteness and anonymity allows them a symbolic presence as Transcendentalist visions, perhaps signifiers of high art and even higher aspirations of soulfulness. In their day, Dewing's fey maidens became almost cult objects, representative icons of self-cultivation and independence of spirit—the thoroughly self-reliant American attitude that Emerson encouraged in his readers. The artist disparaged the high-flown rhetoric of his many women admirers who saw their cultured aspirations reflected in his figures, perhaps out of guilt for the sexual shenanigans in which he and his fellow clubmen indulged with some of his models.[75]

There is certainly a family resemblance between Dewing's figurative landscapes and those of his Tonalist colleagues, although Dewing brought the style to its highest pitch of imaginative refinement. There are echoes of George Fuller's ghostly female wraiths, straight out of Longfellow and Hawthorne, that haunt Fuller's Deerfield meadows, and of Inness's bewitching watchers in the gloaming. Twachtman's pastels, especially his filigrees of meadow grasses and flowers, also must have found resonance in Dewing's imagination. Dewing painted explicitly for the elevated few who had the cultural refinement to understand his elevated viewpoint. For its audience, the enjoyment of a Dewing, or for that matter the enjoyment of nature—and a work of art by Dewing was in essence a transposition of nature through the artistic imagination—required self-cultivation, not just through education, but by immersion in all the arts: poetry, literature, theater, and the other fine arts. All played a part in Dewing's rarefied visions—the insights derived from one flowing into the next and sustaining the whole. Dewing tapped into a growing mood of mystic agnosticism and Darwinian uncertainty that was pervasive among the cultural elites of the time. Among all the Tonalists, he was certainly the most undemocratic in attitude, able to rely for sales on wealthy collectors prompted by their upwardly mobile social aspirations, although his snobbish aloofness may have only whetted the appetites of middle-class collectors for his more affordable pastels. His art, in some respects, forms a transition from the cult of art for art's sake in its early Whistlerian guise—losing ground by the late 1890s—to a more expressive art with a larger and more vibrant symbolic content that was coming into vogue by 1900, when art became a means to a deeper understanding and spiritual engagement with humanity's most profound existential issues. In the art of Dewing, Tryon, and Twachtman, the Whistlerian cult of beauty elides into a peculiar American Romantic ideal, less a material, if beautiful, product and more a path to grace: for the aspirant, a way of release and transcendence.

Dewing painted only a few landscapes after the turn of the century. He was deeply moved by Whistler's retrospective in 1904 at Boston's Copley Society and returned to figurative scenes, some inspired by Vermeer, in which he situated his models in spare interior settings, often in groups, the scenes heavy with psychological overtones prompted by the ambiguity of space, spare abstract compositions, and hinted psychological narratives that beg for more information. *The Recitation*, 1891 (fig. 5.87), though set in a Cornish garden, has such a stark geometric backdrop that at first glance this landscape might be mistaken for an interior. Absent the figures, the chairs, and the floral patterns, the remaining foreground, middle ground, and sky approximate the formalist aesthetics of work by Mark Rothko. *The Recitation* is a meditative appeal to Emersonian uplift and a bow to Whistlerian iconoclasm. Like Twachtman, who never had the luxury of a cadre of elite supporters, Dewing was an artist's artist, a modernist before modernism was understood as such. His work, following Whistler's lead, was more about artistic problems to be solved than adherence to reality. Charles Lang Freer, who was drawn both to Asian art and fascinated by Whistler, found underlying correspondences between Dewing's painting and the porcelains he collected, especially the artist's bewitching surface patina and use of colored glazes. The abstract spirit found in Asian art, the same hermetic beauty Whistler and La Farge valued, confirmed Dewing in his aloof rejection of the sentimental narrative effusions found in the Impressionist works of William Paxton, Joseph De Camp, and Edmund Tarbell, with whom he was allied as a member of an artists' exhibiting organization know as The Ten.

A new generation of modernist critics like Sadakichi Hartmann, Royal Cortissoz, and Charles Caffin, who took up the call for a distinctive and progressive American art from Charles de Kay, Clarence Cook, and the Gilder circle, embraced Dewing as an American original after the turn of the century. Caffin, with Freer's prompting, recognized Dewing's allegiance to the abstract values found in Asian art, and his goal of universalizing his figurative depictions by removing them from everyday reality, and thus situating them in the realm of the symbolic. "Everything takes on the significance of the symbol, interpreting to one's capacity for intellectual sensuousness the most exquisite suggestions of form, tone, and texture."[76] Ultimately, the meaning in Dewing's work is found in the paint surface itself: abstract, scintillating, the lovely color marks in all their variations, in the touch, feel, flow, and gesture of the artist's hand. Dewing's silent figures evoke universal emotional states, but offer no resolution—or insight—beyond the viewer's personal associations. The works' lack of resolution is what makes Dewing's ambiguity so alluring and allies it to the modernist enterprise: the eye is offered visual clues but no answers. Dewing in a very different context, like Inness, was a master of the unseen. He was one of the very few figurative artists of his generation to create an intriguing and thus vitalizing ambience for his refined feminine imagery, the uncertain subtext energizing rather than sentimentalizing the conspicuous beauty of his models.

Dwight Tryon (1849–1925) and the Aesthetics of Landscape Painting

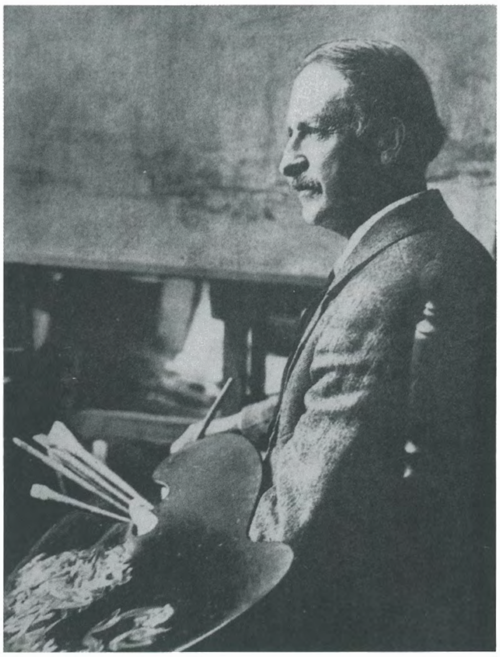


Fig. 5.88. Undated photograph of Dwight Tryon.

Dwight Tryon (fig. 5.88) was unique among Tonalist painters in that he was a born-and-bred landscape painter, first as a Hudson River style artist in his early youth when he rowed the Connecticut River in his hometown of Hartford, then as he employed a modified Barbizon style during his studies in Europe, and finally after his return to America as he discovered the full flowering of Aesthetic Tonalism, which he proceeded to adopt as his signature style and pursued zealously to the end of his career. A close friend of Dewing, Tryon was also a favorite of Charles Freer, who systematically purchased many of his finest works after 1889, and Tryon never lacked for patronage. Perhaps no artist of his generation so utterly immersed himself physically and emotionally in his chosen landscape, the sea and shore of his favored painting grounds of South Dartmouth, Masssachusetts. For more than forty years, he spent seven months of each year sailing, fishing, and exploring his beloved coastal waters of Buzzards Bay, until its character—its people and history—and its atmospheric moods became second nature to him. In addition to possessing intrepid outdoor skills, Tryon was also extremely well read, a committed intellectual and connoisseur of literature and philosophy, and especially devoted to the Concord poets Emerson and Thoreau, whom he paraphrased often. His devotion to the raw New England countryside and its Transcendentalist interpreters contributed to a landscape art that is one of the consummate embodiments of the New England mind in the Tonalist canon. Tryon's work combined a superior technical facility with a passionate investment in his native ground that imbued his art with a material integrity lifted to a plane of meditative wonder. In addition, Tryon fully exploited the Whistlerian decorative manifesto, which revolutionized the New York art world of the early 1880s, infusing it with a formal abstraction of rare beauty. Tryon said of his paintings, "They are all a more or less conscious effort to produce rhythm of emotion when applied to decoration"[77] and "Color in painting is like music, harmony at a proper distance."[78] It is this gift for synthesis—the ability to meld hard-won technical grace with a deep, intuitive poetic sense—along with the instinct for the spiritual note, that places Tryon's lyrical landscapes at the apogee of Aesthetic Tonalism. Only J. Francis Murphy—and possibly Charles Warren Eaton, Inness, and Ben Foster—come close to embodying such deep-rooted attachment to the land in their art. Tryon's biographer, Henry C. White, a painter, student, and friend who knew him intimately for forty years, was prompted to write in 1930, "It seems to me a fair analogy to say of Tryon, 'No wonder he could paint New England! He *was* New England!'"[79]

After first painting in a realist manner reminiscent of the late Hudson River style, Tryon went to France where he worked with one of the last of the original Barbizon artists, Charles-François Daubigny, in 1877. Daubigny died the following year and so Tryon's exposure to the old master was brief. Constable, Turner, and especially Corot seem to have been an important influence on Tryon's landscape style in his early years abroad, althhough his European landscapes display a romantic lyricism that even for the early 1880s seems somewhat dated. Unlike those American landscapists who traveled to France for training and then finessed the strictures of the French academic tradition by studying with teachers who stressed painting technique and unlike those who spent most of their time in the American artist colonies in Brittany, Tryon put himself through three winters of disciplined training in the meticulous drawing of the figure from a pupil of Ingres, Jacquesson de la Chevreuse. These years of study proved invaluable and Tryon proved to be a brilliant draftsman. His deftness of execution and skill in capturing the full weight and power of his forms and masses lay the foundation for his formidable ability as an imaginative painter of landscape. As Henry White noted, ". . . the anatomy and structure which, like granite ledges, underlie the poetry and mystery of his landscapes, are the direct result of this searching study of form."[80]

Among the landscape painters of Tryon's generation who traveled to Paris and subjected themselves to similar rigors of academic training, and emerged with similarly stellar results, were Twachtman and Charles H. Davis, along with Dewing and Abbott Thayer, and possibly Dennis Miller Bunker, Charles Platt, and Arthur Hoeber; all are artists who combined a superb feel for architectonic form with the mystery of the atmospheric envelope in which the telling sinews of the landscape armature are contained and harmonized. (If Whistler regretted anything, it was his failure to steep himself fully in the drawing discipline of Ingres, as he admitted to his friend the artist Henri Fantin-Latour.) This combination of exactitude, of method and science, with the metaphysics of the imagination produced some of the finest works of Aesthetic Tonalism in American art during the 1880s and 1890s, a kind of golden mean in which the American love of the concrete was successfully merged with the equally loved ideal and transcendent. The finest exponents of American Tonalism, Tryon and Twachtman, realized this golden mean, always keeping enough structural integrity, weight of form, and detail to balance the amorphous mysteries of tone (Inness struggled to perfect this balance all his life). By 1900, much of this piquant exactitude had been sacrificed to a larger striving after painterly expression and the reveries of symbolization, or in the worst cases, to academic Impressionism and a diffusion of structural power.[81]

With all his gifts and determination, had Tryon remained in Europe he probably would have proceeded along the clichéd path of post–Barbizon landscape painting. It was the dynamic of the New York art world that shook up his art and directed it in new and propitious directions. In 1881, Tryon settled into a New York studio and the following year became a member of the Society of American Artists. At that time, membership in the society was treated like a prestigious graduate degree for the finest students returning from abroad. It is also telling that Tryon, after five years working and traveling in Europe, was amazed by what he saw exhibited at the society. Years later he wrote, "It was evident that the many artists who had been studying in Europe had made full use of their talents and opportunities, for here was a renaissance in art showing both genius and culture."[82] What Tryon was seeing was the convergence of the Munich- and Paris-influenced styles of the expatriate artists, a flowering of Whistlerian decorative elegance, and the homespun idealism of American-trained artists like Inness and J. Francis Murphy—an American hybrid landscape school on the rise. For Tryon, it was a surprisingly sophisticated mix that made his own Barbizon-Corot–inspired landscapes of the early 1880s—American and foreign scenes—look slightly conventional if well painted. Charles de Kay barely commented on Tryon during his early years of exhibiting in New York (even passing over his Webb Prize–winner at the society in 1889); not until the 1890s, when Tryon's signature style of Aesthetic Tonalism was well established, did the critic become an enthusiastic supporter. It is singularly telling that Tryon's Barbizon-style landscapes were hardly cutting-edge in progressive American art circles—certainly not by the mid-1880s. In the late 1880s, his art took a radical turn. Tryon's painting *The First Leaves* (1889, Smith College Museum of Art), which won the society's Webb Prize in 1889 and features a decorative line of trees—what would become the artist's signature motif—is representative of this change. Two critical admixtures hastened Tryon's move to a modern disposition, and they were the same critical components that time and again proved the formative dynamic in the art of the greatest talents among the American Tonalists: the heady spirit of home ground and Whistlerian aestheticism.

The first change resulted when Robert Swain Gifford, introduced Tryon to a new painting location—one that

Gifford had known and loved since childhood—the village of South Dartmouth on Buzzards Bay. The countryside provided the inspirational boost essential to Tryon's development. There, summer after long summer, beginning in the spring and extending to late fall, Tryon discovered a landscape that at once inspired him and allowed him to fully deploy the techniques of decorative patterning derived from Whistler and his fellow Tonalist painters. The poetic formalism of Thomas Dewing, J. Alden Weir, and William Merritt Chase, with an admixture of the romantic nocturnes of Albert Pinkham Ryder and Ralph Albert Blakelock, were undoubtedly catalysts in Tryon's move to more Whistlerian modes. Tryon treasured both a Blakelock and a work by Alexander Wyant that he owned. The art of fellow Century Club member John La Farge was also a model, especially his stained-glass windows, which Tryon constantly pointed out to his students as epitomizing the mysterious tonalities and opalescent atmosphere that he tried to capture in his oils and pastels. That other consummate New Englander, William Morris Hunt, especially his art writings, was a lodestar for Tryon. And collector Charles Freer, who immediately detected the decorative qualities of Asian art in Tryon's surface patina, began buying Tryon's Whistler-inspired Tonalist landscapes in 1889 and never stopped.

As his Branchville farm inspired Weir, as Murphy's Catskills hermitage infused his landscape style, so the broad meadows and delicate lines of springtime trees and the granite outcroppings and fieldstone walls of South Dartmouth exerted their rustic charms on Tryon. *Summer Landscape*, circa 1886 (fig. 5.89), displays Tryon's transition from his early Barbizon style to a more painterly and rhythmic application of pigments; here, rivulets of brushstrokes, informed by the undulations of rocky outcroppings, describe a place alive to the artist's imagination and in turn expressed in the fluidity of his hand. It is notable that Tryon and Murphy, perceptive readers of Thoreau, shared such a devotion to a single location. Both had the means to spend almost two-thirds of the year at their beloved rural retreats, using the seasonal escape from their New York studios to gather, not so much direct transcriptions of nature, but the intuited metaphoric force of nature. This was absorbed through experience and stored in memory, and only transformed into art once they were back in their city studios—an art of memory, which for both men, took on a momentum of its own. Both assiduously extracted a kind of abstract and symbolic logic that became increasingly apparent over their careers.

By 1887, the picturesque representations of place that had once filled Tryon's early work had almost entirely disappeared. Even a relatively straightforward scene like *Autumn Landscape*, circa 1887 (fig. 5.90), expresses a haunting diffuseness conveyed in the blurred russet-cinnamon coloring of the meadow plants, the fragrant bayberry, sweet fern, and huckleberry bushes of the foreground. The atmospheric, memory-charged feel of the scene is anchored by uncanny renderings of granite outcroppings, young windblown birches, distant farm buildings, and a few magnificent oaks. This was the scene almost surely described by Tryon biographer Henry C. White: "Forcing one's way through a tangled thicket of bull brier and blackberry runners, one emerged to face a classic landscape of russet oaks and slender birches with sparkling notes of red in the bushes and silver in the rocks."[83] The work depicted one of the many hardscrabble, often-abandoned farms that dotted the countryside near Tryon's South Dartmouth home. Like many intimate landscapes of Aesthetic Tonalism during these years, fetchingly composed meadow flowers pepper the foreground, though with Tryon they are mere blurry brush marks, while a subtle overall grayish tonality casts a lush and luminous autumnal spell. As Tryon said of his work, "The most beautiful pictures are usually an intelligent combination of more or less

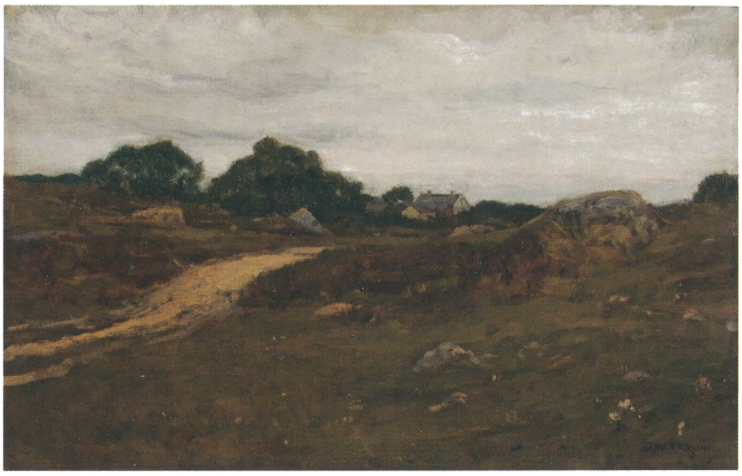


Fig. 5.89. Dwight Tryon, *Summer Landscape*, c. 1886. Oil on panel, 14 x 22 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

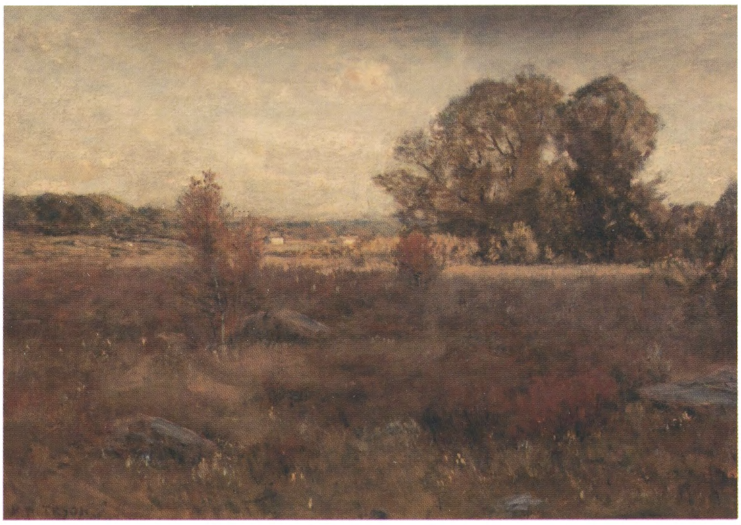


Fig. 5.90. Dwight Tryon, *Autumn Landscape*, c. 1887 (ex. col. George A. Hearn). Oil on cradled panel, 14 x 20 in. Private collection.

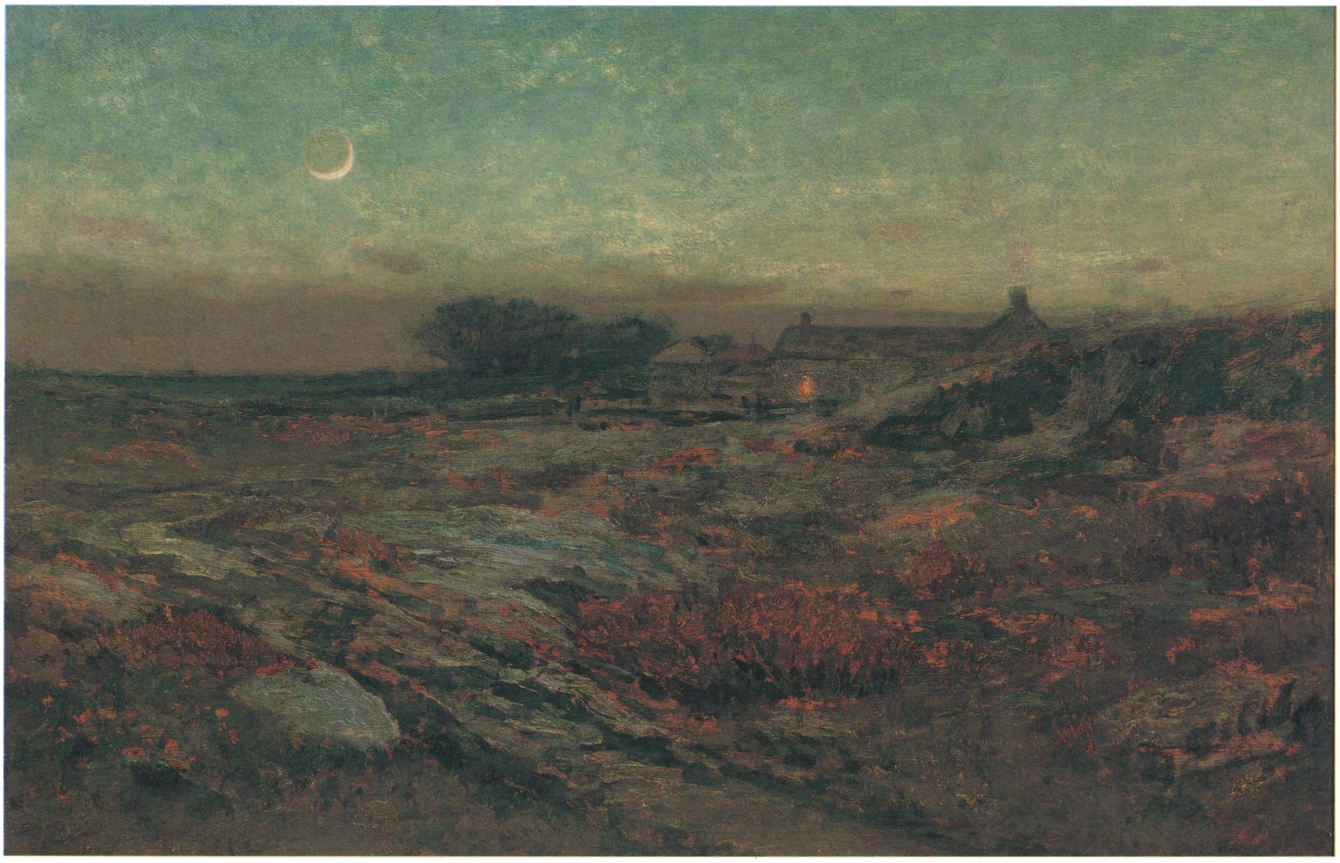


Fig. 5.91. Dwight Tryon, *Moonlight in November*, c. 1887. Oil on cradled panel, 19 x 31 in. Private collection.

abstract things rather than an exact rendering of objects, the quality of the work often depending on the perfect relation of a few tones of color to each other . . . "[84] There is an inescapable ache of nostalgia for a vanished way of life—and for the lost lives—that suffuses this rough and weathered landscape, a wealth of associative emotion that lifts the compositional aesthetics and subtle patterning to a metaphysical level. What is left out is as important as what is left in, or as Homer Dodge Martin commented about a painting by Tryon: "That picture is a sacrifice of the things that are not for things that are."[85] It is known from Tryon's biographer, White, who explored these South Dartmouth landscapes with the artist, that Tryon carefully and thoroughly sought out such places, landscapes that spoke as much to his aesthetic sense—in the way stone walls and granite outcroppings shape and pattern the earth's surface—as to his deep reverence for the lost and fading world of his New England seafaring countrymen. Within his lifetime he saw even these relatively remote regions—peopled by old sea captains from whaling days past—overrun by country homes and the motor car.

So strong were Tryon's sympathies with and allegiance to his home ground, the pastures near the town of Padanaram, Massachusetts, where the artist had his cottage, that he rarely explored other locations or showed much interest in painting landscapes farther away. Tryon said of his inspiration, "It seems to me that every country has a soul as well as a body, and this soul is what is really worth giving expression to in Art."[86] He noted further in a letter, "One may travel long and never find the same or as fine a country as New England. And this is right; to the properly balanced mind the charm of one's native soil speaks a deeper language than any other."[87] Tryon was paraphrasing Thoreau, whom he read avidly. "I am afraid to travel much or to famous places, lest it might completely dissipate the mind. Then I am sure that what we observe at home, if we observe anything, is of more importance than what we observe abroad. The far-fetched is of the least value. What we observe in traveling are to some extent the accidents of the body, but [what] we observe when sitting at home are, in the same proportion, phenomena of the mind itself."[88]

The sea change in Tryon's art, the confluence of place, "the phenomena of the mind itself," with a Whistlerian sensibility is most apparent in Tryon's moonlight scenes from around 1887. *Moonlight in November*, circa 1887 (fig. 5.91), may have been exhibited at the Society of American Artists' annual exhibition of 1888. This brooding and sumptuous nocturne of Tryon's home ground, just a few miles from his retreat in South Dartmouth, combines a raw painterly power with a delicacy of expression that captures the haunting poetry of a late fall evening. Henry C. White, who accompanied Tryon to the place of its first inspiration, wrote: "Given the rich color of late October and early November, when the deciduous trees have dropped their leaves, when the oaks are reddish bronze, the birches golden and the bushes scarlet, the stage was set for the artist who had wandered hither. The beauty of it was bewildering . . . A few steps more to a clearing and a noble moorland stretched away, simple and austere, with granite ledges in the nearer foreground. A rutted cart-path wound among the rocks and underbrush, and led on to a low white farmhouse with a wisp of smoke blowing from it chimney."[89] Tryon recorded the scene in a small study and turned it into a large painting, *Dartmouth Moorlands*, 1883 (fig. 5.92). *Moonlight in November* is a later more dramatized and decorative version, using moonlight to further heighten the mystery and bring out the bewitching patterns formed by the rugged granite ledges. Whistler is an obvious influence, but less in style and more in the technical means by which Tryon has allowed the dark russets of his panel to bleed though to create a vibrant harmonic undertone. The asymmetrical thrust of the stony outcropping looming out of the foreground is precisely the kind of compositional strategy Charles Warren Eaton learned from Dewing in the early 1880s at the Art Students League. But the overall motif, the pantheistic oblations of the moonlit nocturne most likely has its origins with Blakelock and Ryder, whose work Tryon would have seen in abundance in the Society of American Artists and National Academy of Design annual exhibitions. Tryon said of his own work that he was never as much interested in time or place as in communicating the "mood or special phase of nature."[90] He elaborated, "Mystery, infinity. A painter who feels these truths in nature is humble. He frankly acknowledges there is something that cannot be painted. But this draws him on, and the highest and most lasting things are these suggestions. In this striving for the spiritual, the higher the whole, so insensibly but surely parts come to belong to the whole."[91] For Tryon, as for his fellow Tonalists (one thinks immediately of Inness's "unseen"), the spirit of the season, the fugitive moment, the concentrated essence of the transition from one state to another, became the visual impetus to creation. In this sense, Tryon and his Tonalist contemporaries harnessed the metamorphic energies of Ovid: change and changelessness were the true subjects of their landscape poetry.

In later years, spring in particular (unlike the fall melancholy favored by Murphy) became the catalyst for Tryon's finest inspiration. Late in the winter, holed up in his Central Park West apartment, he pined to get away to South Dartmouth, anxious that he might miss the first stirring of spring, the hint of green buds in the bare tree lines he so loved. It is telling, too, that in later years Tryon distanced himself from his Barbizon roots and the teaching of Daubigny, especially concerning the use of tone. By 1896, Tryon could even be somewhat dismissive of his famous teacher: "I have frequently seen him transpose a morning sketch made in full gray light, into a sunset or twilight by adding a note or two of vivid color at the horizon, paying little or no attention to the many notes of color necessary to unite and harmonize two such differing effects."[92] Tryon's

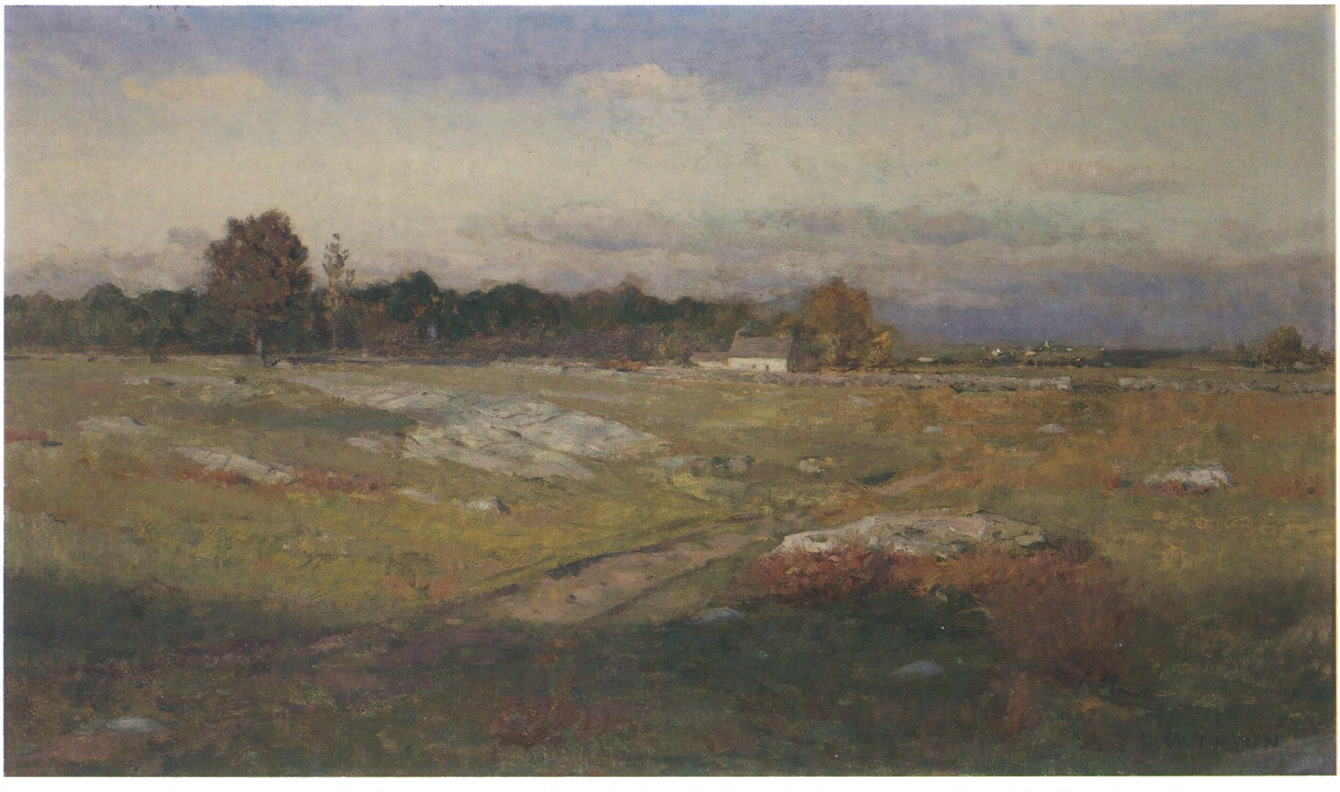


Fig. 5.92. Dwight Tryon, *Dartmouth Moorlands*, 1883. Oil on canvas, 30 x 52 in. Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA. Purchased with the Winthrop Hillyer Fund.

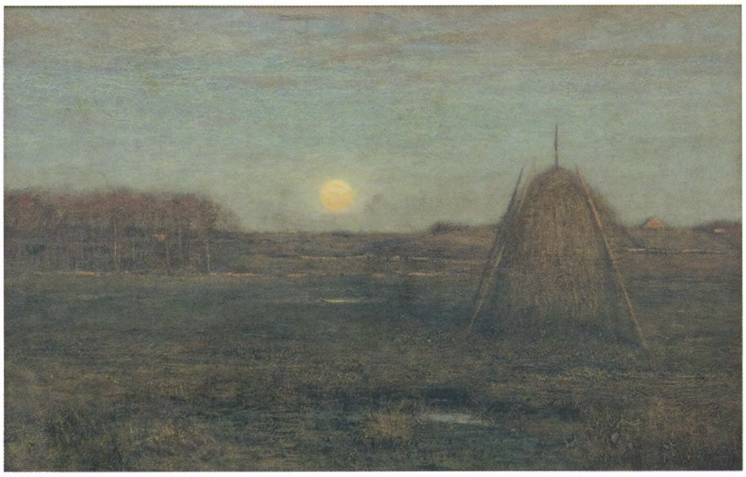


Fig. 5.93. Dwight Tryon, *The Rising Moon: Autumn*, 1889. Oil on wood panel, 20 x 31 in. Smithsonian, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

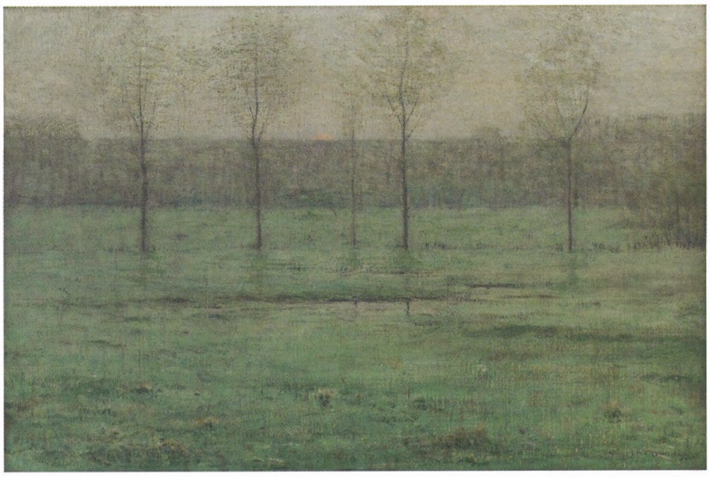


Fig. 5.94. Dwight Tryon, *Twilight: Early Spring*, 1893. Oil on canvas, 22 x 33¼ in. Smithsonian, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

retrospective disparagement of the Barbizon tradition is another indicator of the distance the Tonalists had traveled by 1900—the idea that they were followers of the artists of 1830, or not thoroughly American with their homegrown brew of Aesthetic Tonalism, would have been dismissed out of hand. Tryon's increasing interest in the late 1880s to refine and obtain exquisitely subtle transitions of tone is emblematic of the preoccupation of his generation of artists with using tone as a distinct means of expression in its own right. Having jettisoned narrative content, tone became a new language, a signifier of mood, of mystery and uncertainty, and stood for the searching spirit of the age.

Tryon's meteoric rise indicates how well his art fit with the prevailing critical and market climate that insisted on an American landscape art: expressive, profound, and rooted in common experience. In addition to the Webb Prize of 1889, Tryon won the National Academy's Hallgarten Prize in 1887, and as early as the mid-1880s he had sold a work to the important American collector Thomas B. Clarke. But, as it was with Dewing, Tryon's ongoing patronage by Charles Lang Freer after 1889 brought prestige and a steady income that allowed Tryon to spend over half the year enjoying his South Dartmouth retreat, even in the distressed economic climate of the 1890s. (Tryon was an astute businessman, in fact, and probably would have done well even without Freer's patronage.) Freer bought *The Rising Moon: Autumn*, 1889 (fig. 5.93), from Tryon's studio for $1,100. The subtle tonal transitions and exquisitely rendered surface of the painted panel show how completely Tryon had mastered Whistlerian aestheticism, and the sumptuous surface patinas so much admired by Freer. When he was not collecting Asian art, Freer would spend the decade of the 1890s and beyond in pursuit of Whistler's work in England and France for his collection, along with that of Dewing, Thayer, and Tryon. Freer immediately responded to Tryon's vibrant surfaces and bewitching tonal glazes that approached the quality Freer so admired in his collection of Oriental vases and porcelains. In a letter Tryon wrote to Freer, expressing his regret at parting with *The Rising Moon: Autumn*, a work he considered one of his best, the artist echoed Whistler's admonitions that art should be directed to higher purposes. "I am consoled by the feeling that it is going where it will be appreciated. You must not look for a general appreciation of it by many. It will be a picture which the average person will see nothing in and at first sight will not reveal itself to even more cultured ones. If as I feel sure it continues to give you pleasure it will be all I ask."[93] Contemporary critics often compared Tryon's ethereal landscapes with Inness's late synthetic works of Aesthetic Tonalism; both artists were seen to have developed an indigenous, advanced landscape style that was distinct from anything found in Europe at the time.

Tryon's signature style, a horizontal scrim of trees in early spring or fall, was fully established by the early 1890s and remained virtually unchanged until his death—it was a theme and motif that he found endlessly rewarding. *Twilight: Early Spring*, 1893 (fig. 5.94), is an early example of Tryon's fundamentally decorative mode developed in the early 1890s when he and Dewing were painting large murals for Freer's Detroit home. The dematerialized architectonic forms of the landscape, broad bands of horizontals broken by delicate verticals of the budding spring trees, were designed with an overall decorative scheme in mind to suit Freer's requirements, yet are reminiscent of Inness's numinous pines painted in Tarpon Springs of about the same period. Tryon and Dewing's delicate tonal landscapes from these years are close in spirit and character. The high horizon and measured geometries of *Twilight: Early Spring* bring the surface plane of the canvas into prominent focus, where the artist's ravishing brushwork and vibrating tonalities shimmer and swim in a hypnotic display. Late in life, Tryon was somewhat dismissive of these early "decorations" as he had been dismissive of his Barbizon roots, preferring his "richer tonal pictures" from later in his career, more in keeping with fin-de-siècle interest in expressive symbolism (*Autumn Shadows*, 1917, fig. 5.95). Nevertheless, his works of Aesthetic Tonalism of the 1890s retain the freshness and richness of first discovery.

Sunrise: April, 1897–99 (fig. 5.96), and *Daybreak: May*, 1897–98 (fig. 5.97), display the evolution of Tryon's scrim of trees and the infinite variations he could play on a restricted theme. Here again the parallels with Murphy are abundant; both artists adopted similar schemes or formats for their landscapes, often simple, schematic, and executed in a restricted palette evocative of particular seasons and times of day—a serial template that offered near-infinite possibilities of variation, and in turn allowed for the exploration of masterly technical effects and the plumbing of emotional depths. Tryon's early New England springs appealed to him for the spare quivering beginnings of new life displayed in the tree lines he so admired, often glimpsed though rising mists and soft atmospheric haze. This visceral feel for the very unfolding of metamorphosis in nature, for rebirth after the dead of winter, galvanized the artist's imagination. Tryon did relatively little work over his summers in South Dartmouth (he was a fanatical fisherman), preferring to work through the synthesizing process of imagination and memory in his New York studio during the winter months. The remove of memory was fundamental for many Tonalists and key to the conceptualist strategy that made their landscapes less about the specifics of place and more about an expression of the artist's inner temperament. In a copy of William Morris Hunt's *Talks on Art*, which Tryon owned, he marked the following: "Keep yourself in habit of drawing from memory. The value of memory-sketches lies in the fact that *so much is forgotten*." Tryon wrote in the margin: "The less imitation the more suggestion and hence more poetry."[94] In Tryon's allegiance to Hunt, to Thoreau his patron saint, as in so much else, he, too, is a true offshoot of the New England mind.

Once in the studio, Tryon often spent months and years working up his paintings. He preferred working on mahogany panels and began with a rough, high-keyed sketch of the basic structure of his landscape, which he would let dry, and then return to the panel, overpainting the original image and generally toning it down with numerous layers of glazing until he obtained the rich affects he desired. Surface quality was paramount. Often Tryon had little idea where his starts would take him, but as he often said, one thing would lead to another: "One beautiful tone suggests another still more beautiful . . . and so on until it is all beautiful." What Tryon described as "atmosphere" was critical to his goal and he used transparent glazes to achieve the cool tonality and activated surfaces that Freer so admired, "tone after tone and color over color."[95] Unlike Albert Pinkham Ryder, who also employed multiple glazings, Tryon was a careful craftsman and his mediums have stood up well to the test of time. For all the

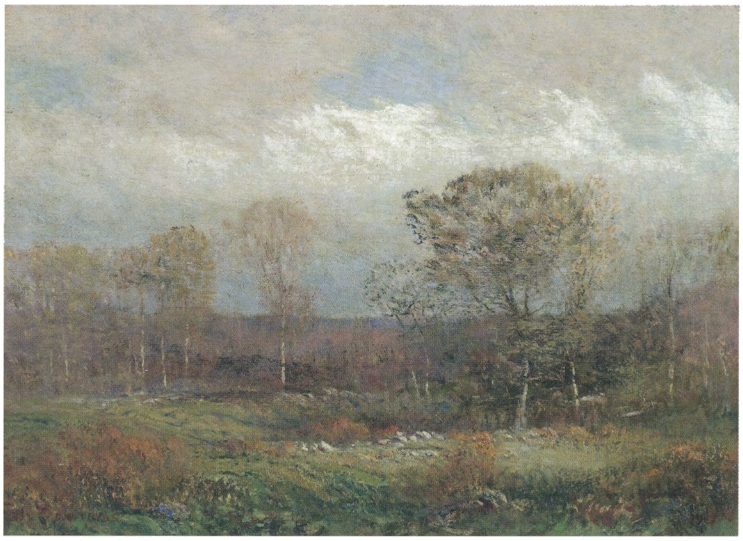


Fig. 5.95. Dwight Tryon, *Autumn Shadows*, 1917. Oil on panel, 10 x 14¹⁄₁₆ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

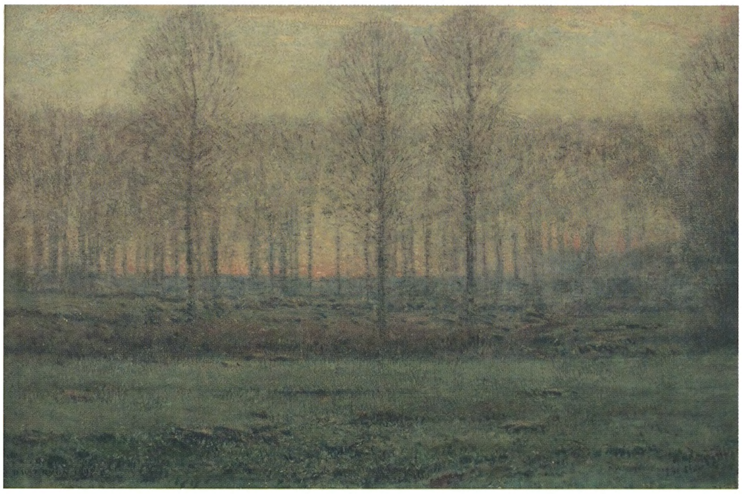


Fig. 5.96. Dwight Tryon, *Sunrise: April*, 1897–99. Oil on wood panel, 20 x 30 in. Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

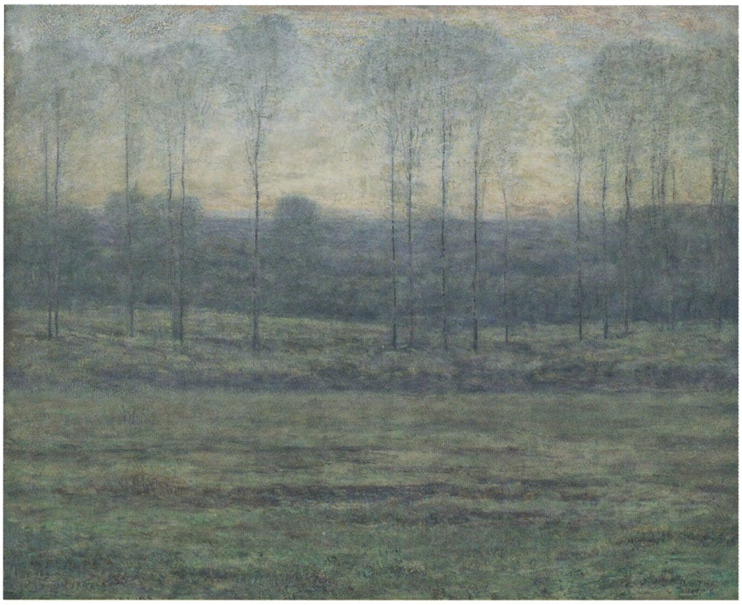


Fig. 5.97. Dwight Tryon, *Daybreak: May*, 1897–98. Oil on wood panel, 26⅜ x 32⅝ in. Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

efforts Tryon put into his work, he was careful not to have his surfaces look labored. "Some things may be easily and directly expressed in paint, but the rare qualities which stand continual study are the result of much work which . . . must be concealed and made to appear spontaneous."[96] Freer, endorsing a painting by Tryon to a friend, specified just how the tonal qualities of the painting were essential to its carrying power. "It is low in tone, extremely mysterious, and still contains that remarkable force and character which is always found in his very best work."[97]

Key to Tryon's finest Tonalist works are the complexity and mystery expressed by the vibration and refraction of tone. His glazed and pebbly surfaces were carefully constructed, often obtaining the smoky transparency of stained glass (the effect of La Farge's windows, which he admired), absorbing and reflecting light in manifold ways. He prided himself on the complexity of his surfaces and the ways in which his paintings were always different, responding to different intensities of light or angles of viewing—if not to the mood of the viewer. In this respect, Tonalism, in the hands of a master like Tryon, was a connoisseur's art par excellence because it required patience, knowledge, and repeated viewings for the full cornucopia of the visual experience to manifest itself—an ocular experience akin to the Zen-like rapture required to fathom completely nature's infinite modalities. In the days of gaslight, when electric lights were first making an appearance, the Tonalist painting was generally executed—and designed to be appreciated—in low and modulated indirect light, often from skylights. When showing his pictures to buyers in his studio, Tryon shaded his window or employed a diaphanous cotton velarium, as Whistler had in his exhibitions, to mute intense sunlight and so show off his work to best effect.

With such lighting conditions in mind, Tryon considered the true test of the painter's art to be the use of neutrals to give paintings color without the use of brilliant color. "Often in painting a bit of sky I will put blue on it and scrape it off; I will put pink on it and scrape it off; I will put yellow on it and scrape it off; I will put green on it and scrape it off, and my sky will look almost white—but it isn't, for it will have in it the vibrations of all those colors."[98] Tryon's anxieties in regard to the difficulty of achieving his effects is expressed in a letter to Freer about *Daybreak: May*, which had proved to be an exhausting project. "I believe it is the most subtle of all my works, and it seems to have more moods and phases than any picture I know—at least it seems so to me and I will be curious to see if you agree with me in this."[99] Freer spent a Sunday inspecting the painting, moving it from room to room, examining it under various lighting conditions until he had exhaustively experienced the varied effects of the protean jewel-like surface. Writing back to Tryon, Freer compared the panel's surface to that of a porcelain vase: "I am sure that I will find many new beauties in the picture as I familiarize myself with it, but I am already impressed with its marvelous interpretation of the mystery accompanying day-break during the spring days. The moist atmosphere and morning dampness are weirdly and beautifully shown, and every inch of the picture seems complete and perfect."[100]

As will be explored in more depth in chapter 7, Tryon's approach to his art went well beyond the literary and poetic to touch on the spiritual realms elucidated by Emerson and Thoreau, and influenced by Darwin. Biographer Henry C. White, who knew Tryon for forty years, wrote of him, "To me the outstanding trait of Tryon's character was reverence. And by that I mean reverence for the things of the mind and of the spirit. He worshipped nature, he had a broad humanity. He was not religious in the orthodox or narrow sense of the term, but he had a great love and respect for the aspirations of the human soul toward spiritual life, especially the love of beauty."[101] White, who was an artist of Tryon's generation, wrote that Tryon was one of those "rare geniuses who selected with sure grasp the material which Nature offered and transformed it into visions of universal significance. I have seen him reproduce, upon the two dimensions of a painted surface, the very *process* of Nature herself. He would first paint a scene of spring or autumn that fully realized the clearness, the complete detail of midday. Then, enveloping his forms with veils of transparent pigment, just as Nature with her mists enshrouds them, he would induce the mood of dawn or twilight. 'People think of atmosphere,' he used to say, 'as somehow less real than the other facts of Nature, but to the painter it is simply a more subtle truth, which he can no more disregard than the rocks in his foreground.' But this pursuit of subtle atmospheric nuances, which carried Tryon so far, never diminished his relish for the solid earth . . . In Tryon we find the rare and happy combination of the poet and the realist. He preserved, as few have ever done, the just relation between earth and sky, between matter and spirit."[102] Such poetry and realism and instinct and technical prowess are found in the greatest Tonalists like Inness and Murphy. As White put it, they sought to reveal "the very *process* of Nature herself." Tryon's ultimate aim, according to White, was "to awaken the sense of Nature's living loveliness, the sense of quivering grass and palpitating clouds, the sense of trees that feel the wind, although they do not bend beneath its weight."[103] This hidden process, the constant motion of hidden life forces as the heart of metamorphosis, or from a Darwinian standpoint, the process of organic change that animates evolutionary adaptation, was a metaphysical preoccupation of the age, and an inescapable reality for late-Victorian culture and Tonalist artists like Tryon—or in the words of Tryon's maxim: "Beauty is fitness."[104]

Tryon's sense of equivalency between beauty and fitness strikes a distinctly Darwinian cord, perhaps more along Spenserian lines in which survival was a sign of fitness. As an avid outdoorsman, the artist may well have been drawn to such notions. Tryon's late work, more broadly painted and expressive of flux in nature, moved to embody in symbolic form Emersonian ideas of permanence and change, change and changelessness, as well as the natural symbolization that infused every page of Thoreau. Here, too, were intimations of Darwin's joy in the grandeur, the sheer diversity and wildness of the organic world. A late work such as *Evening*, 1917 (fig. 5.98), positively seethes with activated brushstrokes and pulsing clashes of raw pigment that suggest a physical equivalency (encompassed in a beautiful work of art) with nature's underlying metamorphic reality. This unseen hand of nature, in which fitness gives all living things their edge in the battle of survival, was not lost on the bookish Tryon, who spent his days immersed in the physical reality of nature—with the hardy relish of a Theodore Roosevelt—while devoting his evenings to literary and philosophical pursuits. White characterized Tryon's return from fishing expeditions in the most down-to-earth terms: a tattered disheveled figure, worn to the bone, clothed in torn and patched outfits, soaked in salt, and splattered from head to toe in fish guts. The critic Charles Caffin recognized this truly unique blend of realist and poet in Tryon, writing of one of his paintings, "One has, in fact, if one treads the path that the picture invites, been led gradually from a realization of the facts of Nature, as we know them, to a consciousness that they are symbols of what we do not know, but may believe in. From purely sense perception we have attained to an exercise of the intellectual imagination.... Tryon's imagination is... intellectual. He is akin to Emerson in the character of his spirituality; with enough of the Puritan heritage of conscience to have no stomach for evasions, however beautiful. He would not transform the vision of the world into a dream, but interprets its temporal and local realities in terms of universal realism. To him... the concrete is a symbol of the abstract...."[105]

Tryon continued to paint his signature tree lines, playing variations on his chosen theme until the end of his life in 1925. Although his best works of Aesthetic Tonalism were painted in the late 1880s and 1890s, and the early years of the new century, his later endeavors in Expressive Tonalism often touch on a grandeur and raw profundity that the the earlier works lacked. Collectors flocked to his door for a chance to buy his work, and as late as 1919 his oils were selling at public auction for over $5,000. Like his friend, Thomas Dewing, his oeuvre conveys a degree of mystery and ambiguity that is at once haunting and enchanting, his broad landscape forms of tree lines and meadows, suspended in rare atmosphere, offer a timeless meditation on nature that would inspire modernists like Milton Avery and postmodern Tonalists like Wolf Kahn, as well as the floating dreamscapes of Mark Rothko.

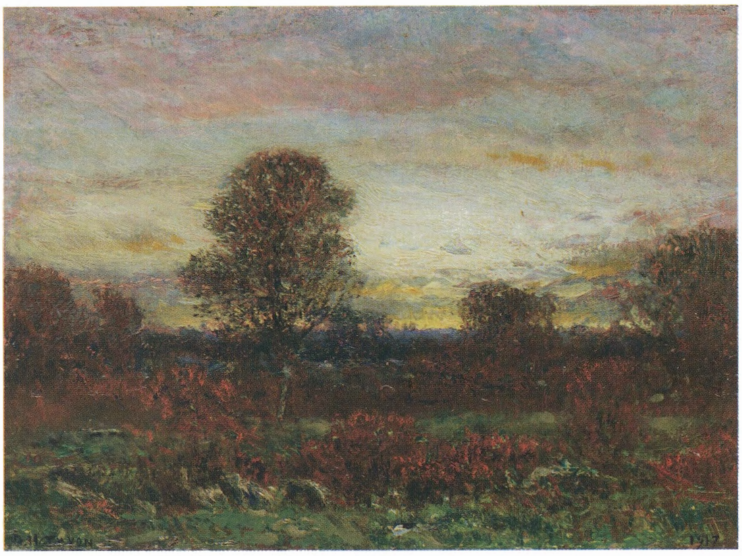


Fig. 5.98. Dwight Tryon, *Evening*, 1917. Oil on panel, 5½ x 7⁹⁄₁₆ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, and Ben Foster: The Young Turks of the 1880s and the Development of Aesthetic Tonalism among the Indigenous American Artists

Following a discussion of the development of watercolor and pastels in the 1880s and 1890s, and an exploration of the ways in which Whistlerian aestheticism and the Tonalist landscape affected the careers of foreign-trained figurative artists like William Merritt Chase, J. Alden Weir, Thomas Dewing, and the landscapist Dwight Tryon, this history now turns to the work of three young Americans artists with no foreign training who adopted Aesthetic Tonalism and transformed the style to suit their own inimitable interpretations of the American landscape. Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, and Ben Foster began their careers in the most formative and dynamic years of the Tonalist movement between 1880 and 1885, when the Hudson River style was in precipitous decline. They were five to seven years younger than the more experienced artists of their generation and so are representative of artists born at the midpoint—the 1850s—of the generation of 1840 to 1865. Of the three, only Foster studied abroad, and only for a brief year in Paris. As New York–trained artists, Eaton, Ochtman, and Foster came to the emergent Tonalist landscape—and the Aesthetic movement—with fresh eyes. Something of this freshness, commingled with the Aesthetic movement's decorative charm and a certain dewy-eyed earnestness and unabashed love of nature, seems to have infused their work with a quiet intensity and spiritual rapture that only youthful inspiration engenders. By 1885 these young Turks were part of a burgeoning movement producing small-scale decorative landscapes: Aesthetic Tonalism. The more mature John Henry Twachtman, Henry Muhrman, William Merritt Chase, J. Alden Weir, Albert Pinkham Ryder, George Inness,

J. Francis Murphy, and Robert Swain Gifford had set the mold as they, too, embarked on a similar course across a range of mediums in the 1880s and 1890s. It is also clear that the older artists were not only impressed by the younger rising stars but also took ideas and renewed inspiration from their work.

Charles Warren Eaton (1857–1937)

Unlike their colleagues trained abroad, Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, and Ben Foster had absolutely no interest in figurative work or academic showmanship, but were solely intent on capturing the splendor of the natural world, or more precisely the quality of subdued light, especially at dawn and dusk, which unified and spiritualized the landscape. Their art was driven by a visceral response to the world of their youth. Charles Warren Eaton (fig. 5.99), for one, was so taken with the effects of sunset in nature that he felt compelled, against all the odds, to take up art in his early twenties.[106] Eaton left his hometown of Albany in 1880 for New York to study at the National Academy School and then the Art Students League, working long hours in a dry-goods store to pay for his upkeep. It was a hard financial struggle but he stuck it out, going to his evening classes in composition taught by Thomas Dewing, where the young Eaton picked up all the latest technical tricks Dewing had mastered from his Paris training along with a strong dose of Whistlerian aestheticism. On weekends, Eaton sketched in the nearby woodlands of the Bronx and the shores of Staten Island, working up paintings in his free time. A cache of letters that Eaton wrote to Ochtman, a childhood friend who remained in Albany during the first years when Eaton was in New York, reveal not just the struggles Eaton faced to support himself and his art studies—but more important, the tenor of the artistic milieu of the early 1880s in which Eaton, a young artist on the rise, made his way.[107] Eaton spent much of his free time preparing to exhibit and visiting exhibitions for instruction and inspiration. The artists he noted in his letters to Ochtman form the roster of the major figures in the expanding Tonalist movement—notably, not a single Hudson River School artist warranted mention.

In an 1880 letter, Eaton admires his composition teacher, Thomas Dewing, and artist George Smillie (who by this time had made the transition from his early Hudson River style to Tonalism) at an Art Students League exhibition (see *Evening among the Cedars*, 1883, fig. 4.22). Eaton writes of a painting by the French Barbizon artist Daubigny that it is "charming in color and sentiment and beautifully composed." In 1881, Eaton notes the best Wyant he has ever seen, as well as a Currier and a Duveneck at the League, "all strong and good and very instructive . . . and an excellent Swain Gifford." In the same year, Eaton is thrilled by an Arthur Bridgman exhibition, "the most important exhibition that I ever saw [see fig. 3.38]." A Wyant at the National Academy of Design is, "one of the very best pictures that I ever saw"; "Walter Palmer [see fig. 5.10] has a truly good thing in the American Gallery." Two years after his arrival in New York, Eaton and Ochtman had paintings accepted in the National Academy of Design annual exhibition of 1882 (a painting by Eaton was favorably noted by de Kay in the *New York Times*). In 1882, Eaton sold his first painting, a marine, from a Salmagundi Club exhibition. In 1883, Eaton admires "a very fine Swain Gifford, the best I think that I have ever seen and also the Dewing." At the National Academy, Eaton notes three fine Murphys that have sold (Eaton shared a studio in October 1883 with Ben Foster in the Vienna Bakery building next to the studio of Murphy and Charles Melville Dewey). In 1884, Eaton is thrilled by the Inness retrospective and attends at least twice, urging Ochtman to come down from Albany to see the exhibition: ". . . you really can't afford to miss it. I am very sorry not to have seen more of it for I have only been twice and it will not be open in the evening anymore. . . ." At the National Academy exhibition he noted with admiration four Tonalists: Hugh Bolton Jones, Bruce Crane, William Bliss Baker (*The Quiet Stream*, circa 1880s, fig. 5.100), and George Smillie—and, "Murphy who comes out better than usual."

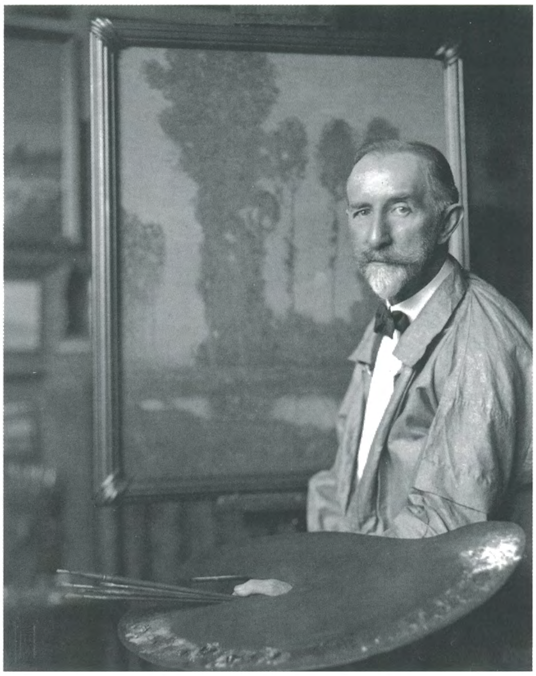


Fig. 5.99. Undated photograph of Charles Warren Eaton.

The year 1884 turned out to be an important one for Eaton; he placed five paintings in the National Academy Exhibition and his first of many to come in the Society of American Artists—the infamous 1884 exhibition for which Chase would draw so much criticism, and Ryder and Blakelock would be paired as "radical colorists." Eaton wrote to Ochtman about his success at the society exhibition: "I consider myself fortunate in having one out of the three pictures sent by me accepted and hung on the line in the large gallery. I am next to George Inness. Of course, the Inness suffers by comparison but not by very much."[108] By 1885, Eaton was encouraging Ochtman to leave

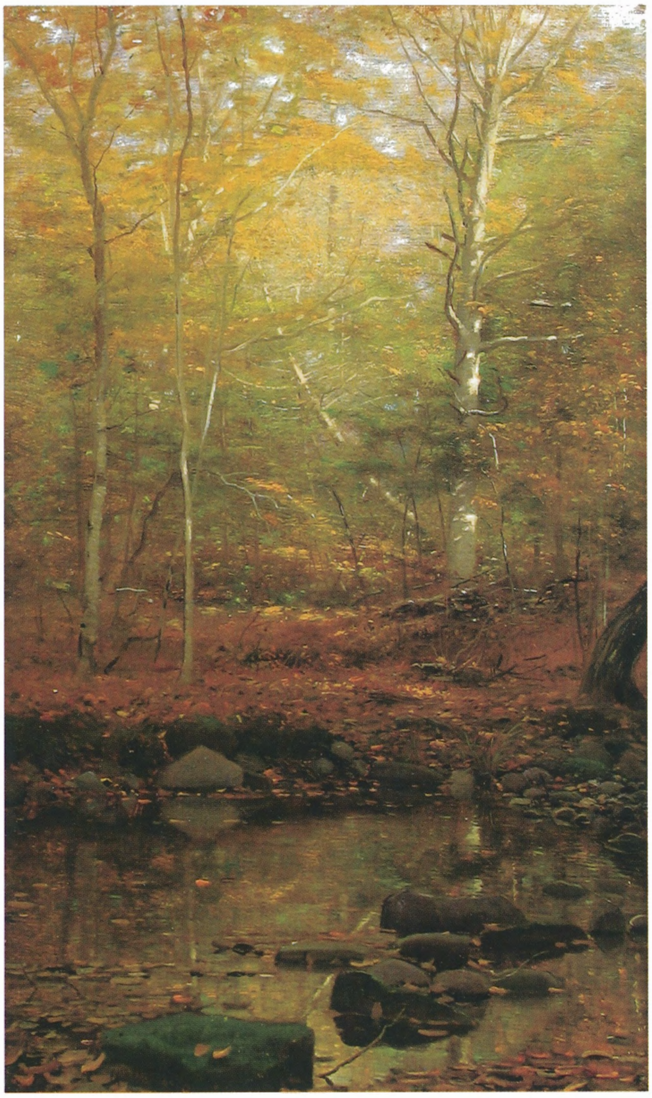


Fig. 5.100. William Bliss Baker, *The Quiet Stream*, c. 1880s. Oil on canvas, 20 x 12½ in. Private collection. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

Albany for good and come and join him and Ben Foster in New York: "Foster has returned and is with me again and I hope that the arrangements we may make will include him also as I have entered into sort of a compact with him to keep together and I know that you will get along with him too for he is a very inoffensive little fellow and besides it will lessen our expenses considerably, for of course he will bear his share."[109] Discussing the Academy exhibition in 1885, Eaton notes the absence of the "best landscape men," Hugh Bolton Jones, Murphy, Tryon, and Swain Gifford, and he notes good artwork by Alexander Harrison, Inness, and Bruce Crane. In 1886, Eaton had two paintings exhibited at the Society of American Artists and by the 1890s he would average almost four acceptances a year—and this under the withering scrutiny of a jury of the finest artists of the day. By the late 1880s, Eaton was able to give up his day job and paint full time, filling major exhibitions with his oils and watercolors for the next forty years.

Even given Eaton's precocious talent, his success illustrates the rapidity of the transmission of new art ideas from Europe, not to mention the rage for Whistler and the Aesthetic movement, by way of the society and the league, and further enhanced by a growing market demand—ratified and encouraged by the critics in the Gilder circle—for the intimate Tonalist landscape as *the* American art. Eaton's early work of the 1880s further demonstrates a freshness combined with a studiously mastered compositional sophistication that captures a kind of fleeting and authentic youthful ardor, the kind of spirit of discovery that one detects in the early Italian landscapes of Corot, the cloud studies of Constable, or the watercolors of Turner. Eaton's *Spring Light*, circa 1890 (fig. 5.101), captures the rapturous, scintillating glitter of sunlight on grass in an early spring afternoon. The stark details of the middle-ground trees meld with the blurry tree line beyond to produce a compositional poise and balance that has a feeling of innocence and youthful splendor. It is a portrait of life that is at once naïve and sophisticated—certainly in execution—characterized by a poignancy that speaks of a lost world.

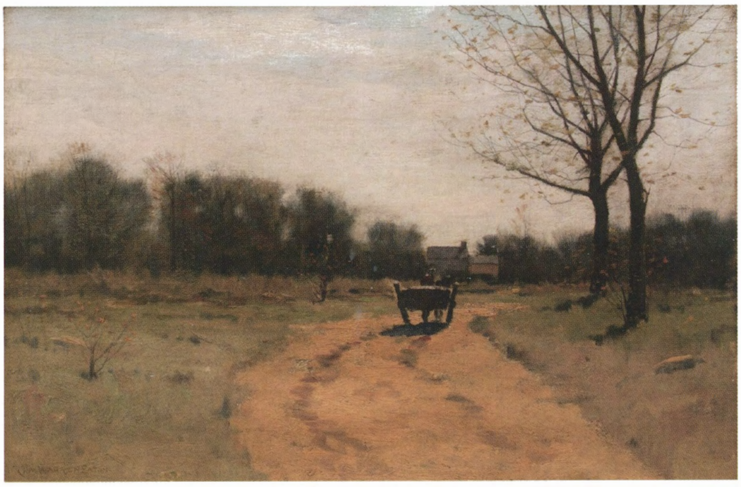


Fig. 5.101. Charles Warren Eaton, *Spring Light*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Private collection.

Eaton, like so many Tonalists, was drawn to winter imagery, not simply for the subdued light and somber mood of the subject matter, but because of the wonderful compositional resources that the stark contrast of organic form against a snowy backdrop offers. *Snow Banks*, 1888 (see fig. 4.40), showing furtive footprints in the snow (the artist retreating from his own composition), offers a subtle but compelling pattern of intervals between the expressive tree trunks that crowd the frozen streambed. The pictorial structure creates a haunting natural enclosure, a kind of winter sanctuary conducive to solitude and meditation—and yet the whole resonates with a strangely unsettling otherworldliness. *Winter Solitude*, 1887 (fig. 5.102), is a tour de force of compositional dexterity and decorative patterning that enchants the eye with the crystalline beauty of winter light. Raw nature has been transformed into something of a winter garden, in which each plant and shrub and chink of reflected light burns with a seering intensity against a neutral backdrop. Eaton has created a visionary place

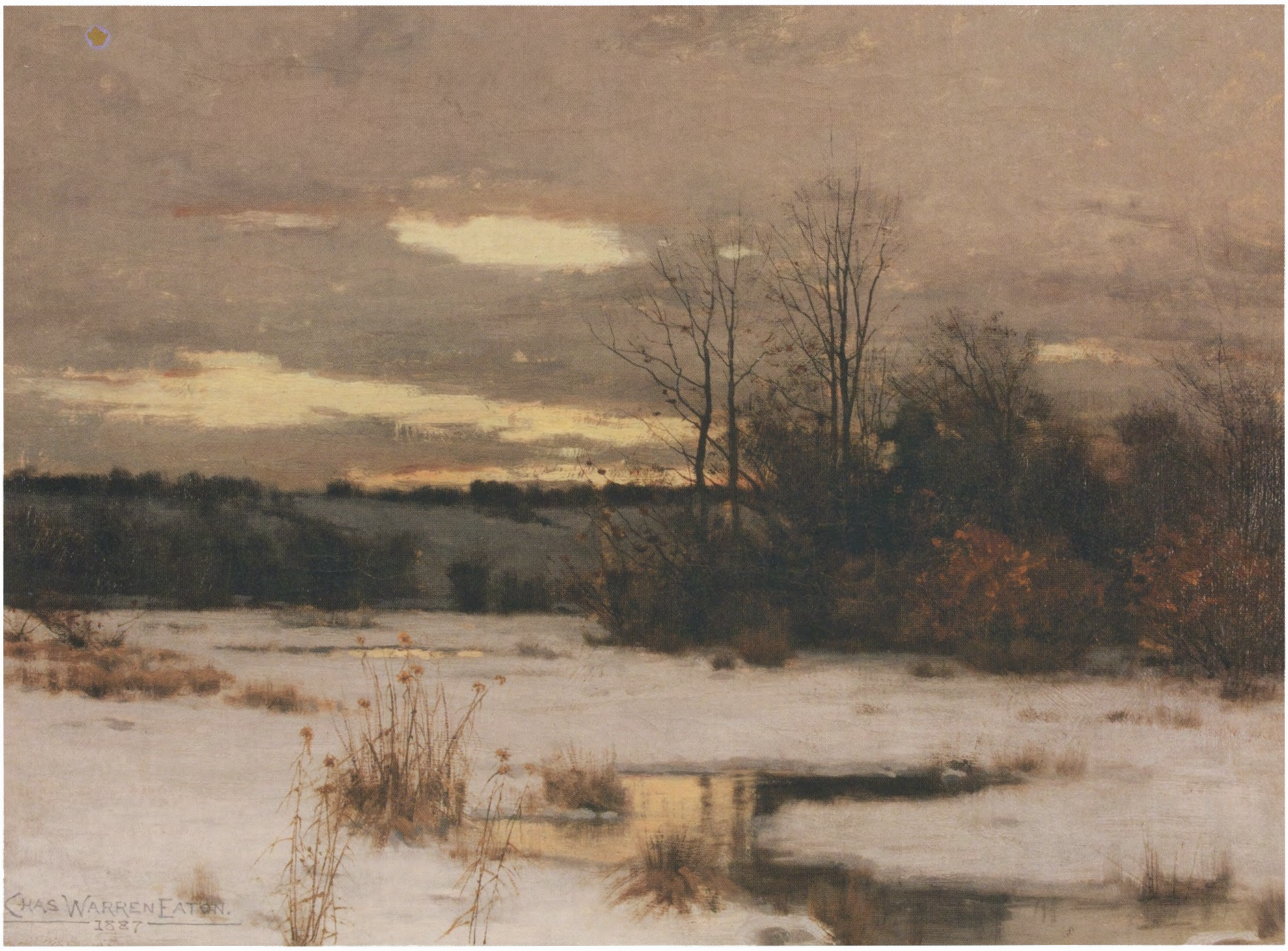


Fig. 5.102. Charles Warren Eaton, *Winter Solitude*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

of comfort and delight that touches on some lost innocence remembered from youthful sauntering. It is a work of an artist inspired less by romantic notions of picturesque than the concision of a craftsman who expertly manipulates color and form to provide an emotional connection for the viewer. The placement of desiccated flowers and grasses, the echoing diagonal forms—the tarnished gold—of the stream bed, leading to the hills beyond, and picked up again in the sunset diagonals of burnished bronze against the gray sky have a near-hypnotic quality of repeated patterns, engaging the eye and leading it insistently from one epiphanous moment to the next. *Winter Solitude* has fully incorporated Dewing's rarefied decorative touches, superbly modulated tonal transitions, and compositional modes, incorporating the very latest ideas about design, pattern, and symbolization—all translated into a distinctive American idiom. It is this uncanny combination of naturalness and technical finesse that underlies the soft-spoken felicities of the American-trained artists like Eaton, Ochtman, and Foster, in turn empowering them and placing them on the cusp of developments in Aesthetic Tonalism in the early 1880s.

Echoes of Dewing's compositional know-how and decorative charm can be found, transformed and incorporated, in almost all of Eaton's early work from the 1880s and into the 1890s. *Quiet Shore*, circa 1885 (fig. 5.103), is replete with Dewingesque Aesthetic movement touches applied to what otherwise might be a standard picturesque lakeside view—except the ordinary has become extraordinary by the subtle

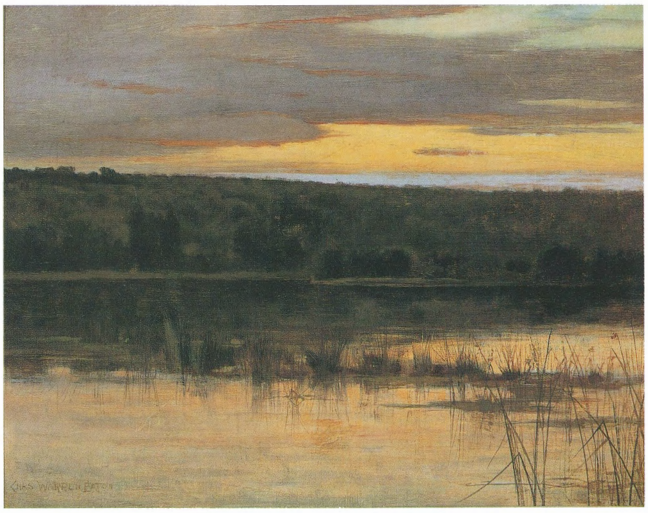


Fig. 5.103. Charles Warren Eaton, *Quiet Shore*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 14 x 18 in. Private collection.

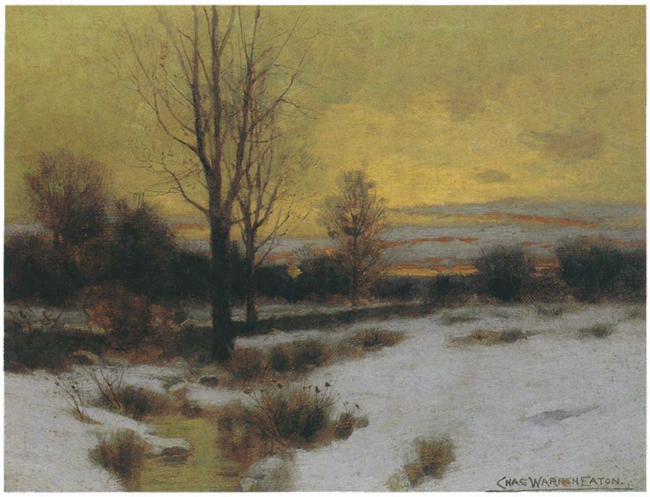


Fig. 5.104. Charles Warren Eaton, *Winter Stream*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 8 x 11 in. Private collection.

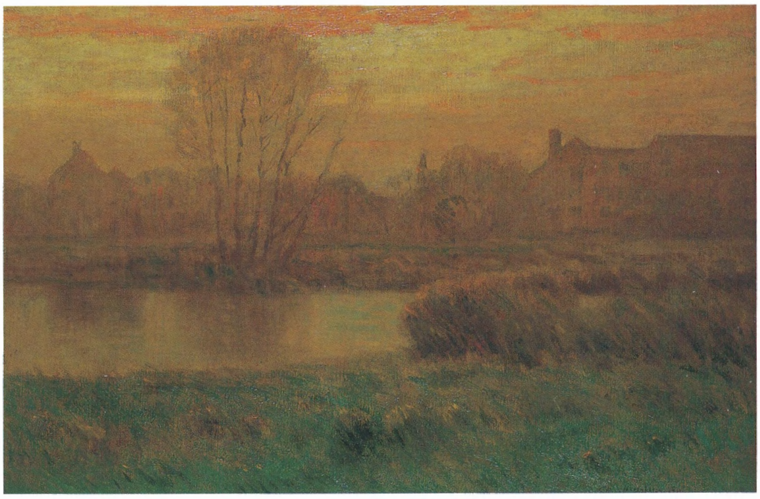


Fig. 5.105. Charles Warren Eaton, *Spring Sunset*, c. 1893. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Private collection.

interplay of deliquescent form and fetching detail. Subtly embedded patterns can be found everywhere: the interlinking bands of color-edged clouds, how the soft tree forms that make up the middle ground are interwoven with tonal variations of extraordinary delicacy and subtle interplay of soft-edged forms, the way the reeds in the water move the eye in interlacing diagonals with a spellbinding calligraphic touch. It is quite possible that Eaton had seen John Twachtman's *Arques-la-Bataille* of 1885 (fig. 3.29)—or similar works by Twachtman—with its saturated tones, numinous design, and accents of foreground reeds. Eaton's lakeside vision pulses with the vitality of felt life that puts Eaton in the forefront of his generation, then working in a decorative Tonalist mode.

Winter Stream, circa 1885 (fig. 5.104), from the same period, demonstrates similar formulas of composition and design that lift the simplified rhetoric of a snowscape to the level of pastoral poetry. Again, diagonal passages formed by the stream, bushes, stone walls, and cloud-laden horizon lead the eye with a zigzag rhythm into the distance. Broad paint forms are broken up by hazy patches of rubbed and exposed ground and offset with fillips of detail: a stem, a leaf, a glint of fading sunlight. Everywhere, variegated surface textures add sparkle. Within the tonal envelope, which gives harmony to the whole, these contrasts of forms and textures—a blurred mass accented by a quickened stoke or sinuous line—enlivens the landscape. Eaton has fully mastered the Whistlerian techniques of allowing the warmer ground to bleed through so as to establish a mellifluous harmony. The scene itself, the represented season of winter, is imbued with an artful grace in the exquisite choreography of form and texture that humanizes the wild. Even more to the point of inspiration is the kindled force of memory embodied in the imagery—the idea of winter as an arrangement—a minuet—of darker brush notes against a white backdrop. It is this surprising release of a kind of compressed emotional power that makes Eaton's small works of these years so compelling: they seem embodiments of memory, of time and place held in fluid suspension. And in an uncanny way, these intimate works are reminiscent of the Hortus Conclusus, the enclosed garden of late medieval paining and tapestry. As art historian Kenneth Clark has so aptly put it in his study of the origins of landscape art, "Nature as a whole is still disturbing, vast and fearful; and lays open the mind to many dangerous thoughts. But in the wild country man may enclose a garden."[110] This feeling of respite from Darwinian struggle, from the teeming cities, from the trauma of the Civil War of recent memory is all encapsulated in Eaton's sheltering abodes. And like the sanctuary signified by the enclosed gardens of medieval art, each tree and plant offers not just decorative delight in pattern and rhythmic form, but engages the contemplative soul as a symbol of a higher mystic truth.

Eaton's *Quiet Shore* and *Winter Stream*, along with Ochtman's *Spring Pasture* (see fig. 5.112), and Ben Foster's *Spring Reflections* (see fig. 5.122) are representative of a kind of golden age in American art of the mid-1880s, characteristic of Aesthetic Tonalism: naïve yet sophisticated, native yet foreign-influenced, full of high sentiment but not sentimental, abstract yet evoking the narrative voice of the viewer's habitual associations. It echoes what Henry C. White said of Tryon's work in South Dartmouth: "... Tryon's landscapes exhale native odors and stir emotions too elusive to transfix in words."[111]

As has already been seen, Eaton was a prolific and fine watercolorist, and with his popular oils and watercolors he seems to have made a modest living even through the worst of the depression of the 1890s—helping to establish the market for Tonalism that would burgeon after 1900. The transition, already noted in his watercolors of the 1890s, to a freer and more loosely brushed style, seems to have likewise affected his oil painting. As early as around 1893 in *Spring Sunset*, circa 1893 (fig. 5.105), Eaton was painting larger with a bolder brushstroke and an overall atmospheric feeling that gives both unity and

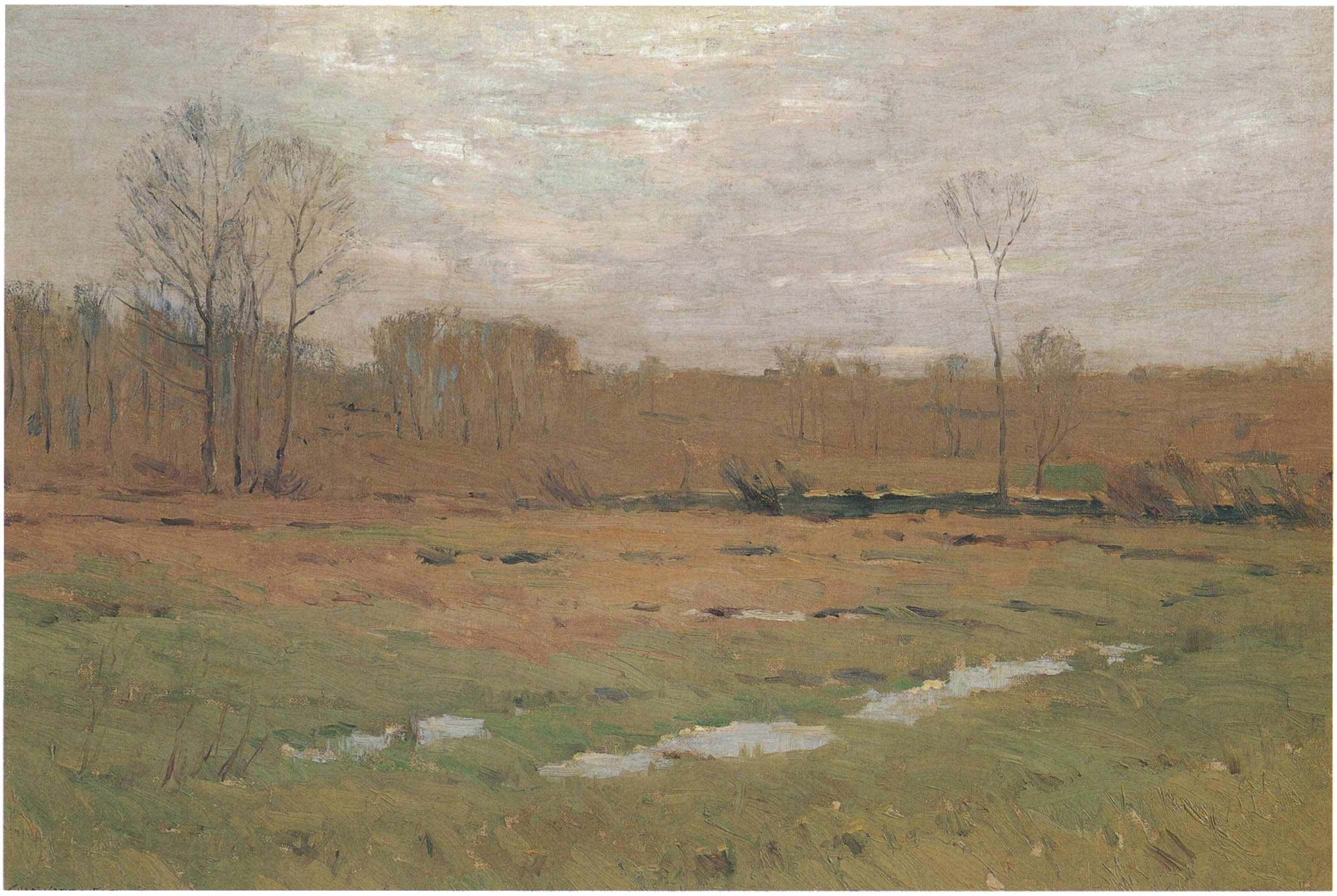


Fig. 5.106. Charles Warren Eaton, *Late Winter Pasture*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

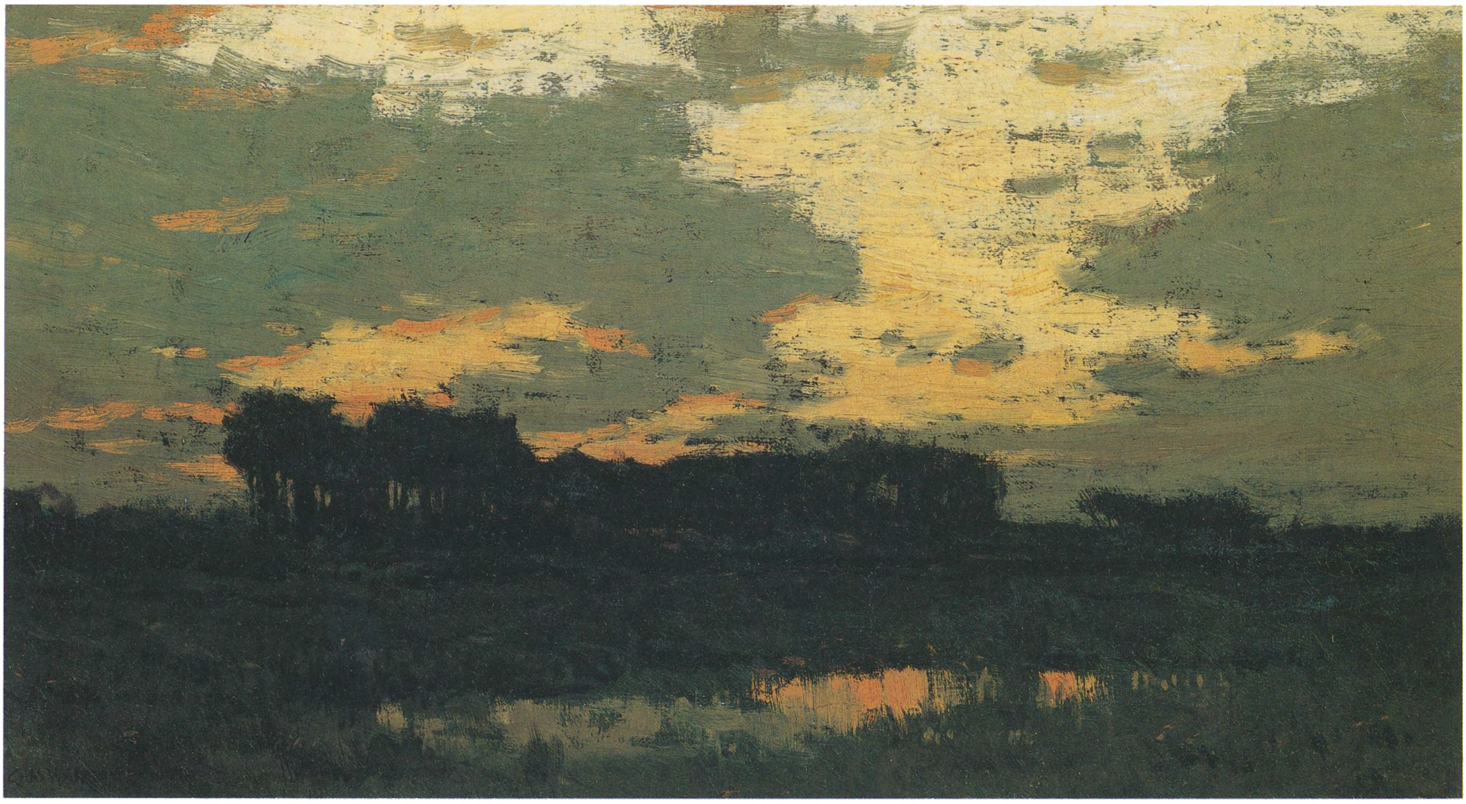


Fig. 5.107. Charles Warren Eaton, *Maine Pines*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 12 x 22 in. Private collection.

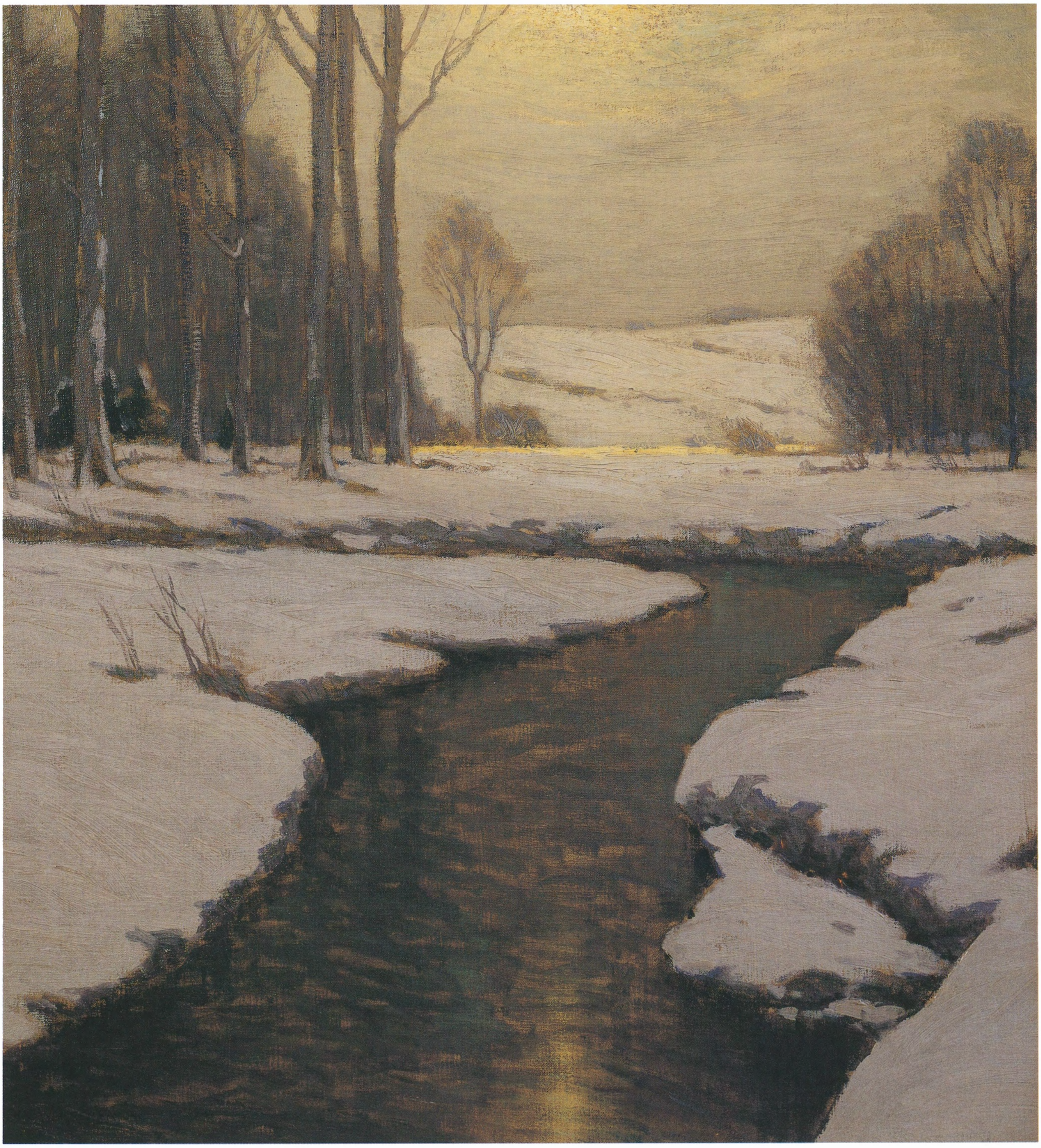


Fig. 5.108. Charles Warren Eaton, *Melting Snow*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 30 x 28 in. Private collection.

harmony to this scene along the Morristown (New Jersey) Canal. By 1900, Eaton's work, as in *Late Winter Pasture*, 1900 (fig. 5.106), seethes with vigorous broken facture and the use of a palette knife to flatten and vary his forms. Although a quiet and peaceful scene, the surface pigments seem near molten in their expressive laying in of wet-into-wet contiguous tones. This expressive momentum in his work becomes even more pronounced with *Maine Pines*, circa 1900 (fig. 5.107), in which the jagged sky and cloud forms and the silhouetted shapes of the tree line produce a riveting graphic quality, a profound drama akin to the fevered brushwork and energized color forms of the Abstract Expressionists of the mid-twentieth century. *Melting Snow*, circa 1900 (fig. 5.108), though less infused with expressive energy, is a sterling example of Aesthetic Tonalism raised to a broader and more dramatic intensity by employing larger, more pronounced patterns, the purely decorative element giving way to an increasingly profound feel for symbolic forms—here the play between the diaphanous

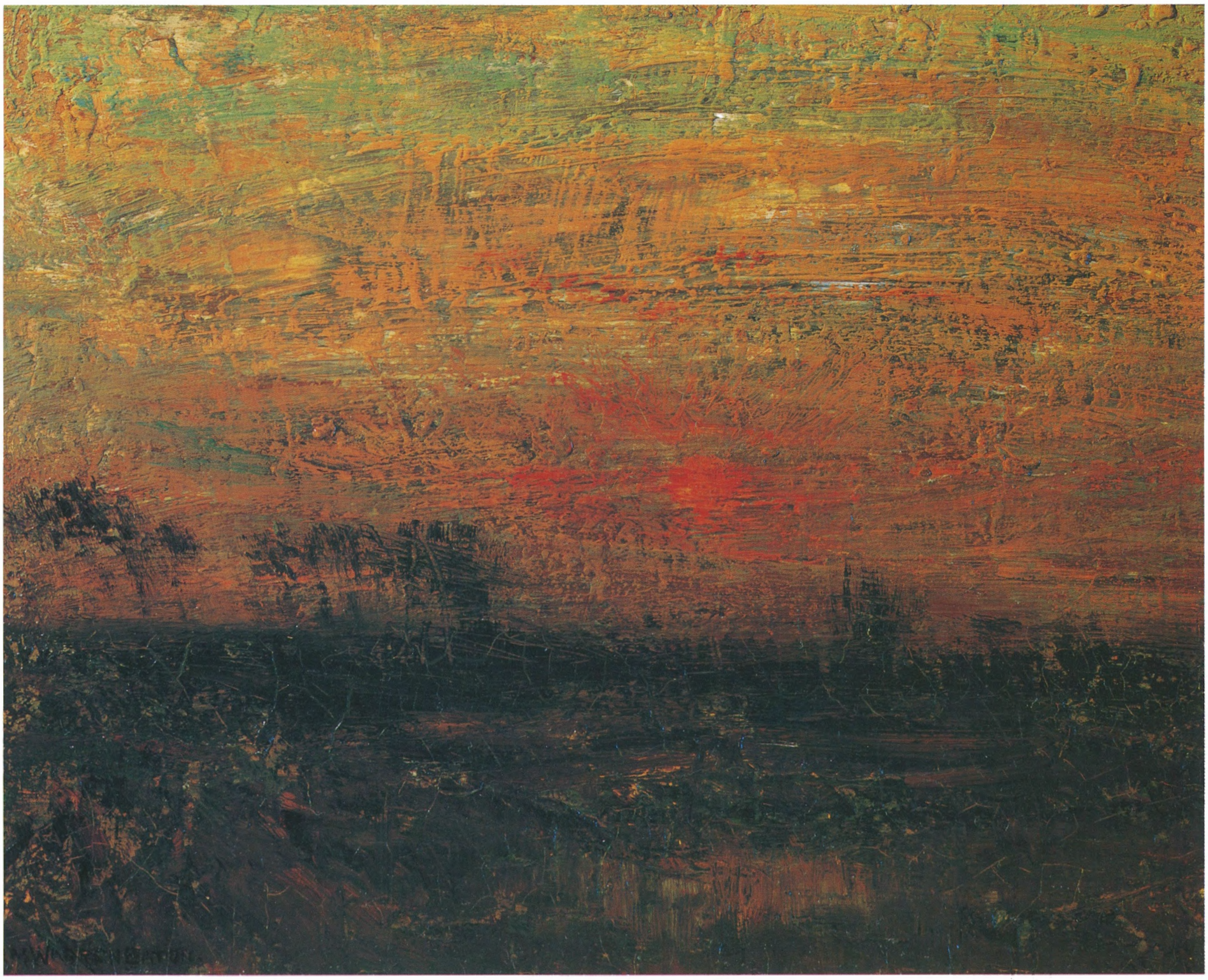


Fig. 5.109. Charles Warren Eaton, *Sunset Trees*, c. 1900. Oil on board, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

stream and the intriguing soft-edged snowbanks—providing a visual tension that carries with immediacy and from a distance. A painting like *Sunset Trees*, circa 1900 (fig. 5.109), approaches almost complete abstraction, the slashing scumbled pigment oriented only by the vaguest outlines of trees and hinted setting sun. For a discussion of Eaton's signature pine paintings and their brooding symbolism, see chapter 7, but it is worth noting here that Eaton provides a textbook paradigm for the evolution of many Tonalist painters—from the Aesthetic Tonalism of the 1880s and 1890s to Expressive Tonalism around the turn of the century and beyond, which retained aspects of its Whistlerian and decorative origins but expanded on every level to include bravura impasto, dramatized symbolic shapes, and powerful graphic design capable of jolting a viewer's eye from across an exhibition space.

Leonard Ochtman (1854–1934)

Leonard Ochtman is an interesting case of a Tonalist artist who had a marked reputation in his day, but one that has not stood the test of time as well as that of some of his colleagues. The scattering of his early and mid-career work has prevented a fuller evaluation of his achievement. Ochtman (fig. 5.110) garnered more medals and honors than his friend Charles Warren Eaton, but unlike Eaton, he failed to find enduring subject matter and inspiration that moved his art consistently to the highest levels after 1905. Like so many artists who live a long life, he tended to repeat his signature style in his later years in a somewhat graceless and ponderous faux-Impressionist style. But like Eaton in the period 1885 to 1905, and a few years beyond, Ochtman created some magnificent work characterized by depths of feeling, refinement, and bucolic poetry. Ochtman was born in Holland, moved as a child to Albany, New York, where he worked as a draftsman, and then studied briefly at the Art Students League in 1879–80,

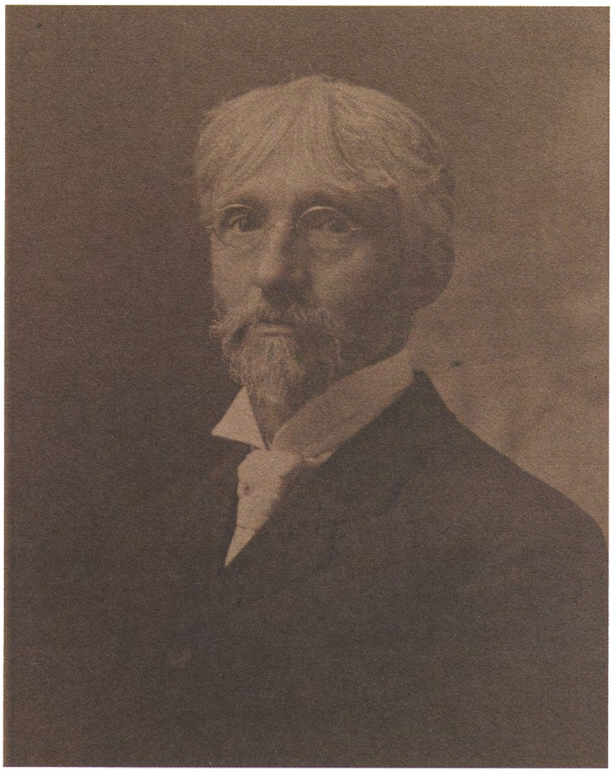


Fig. 5.110. Photograph of Leonard Ochtman, c. 1890. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1836–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

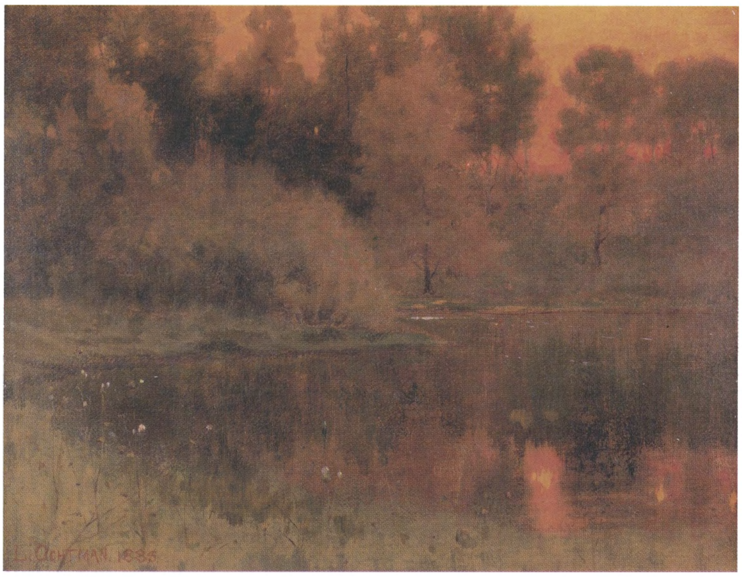


Fig. 5.111. Leonard Ochtman, *A Red Sunset*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 12½ x 16½ in. Courtesy Gallery 454.

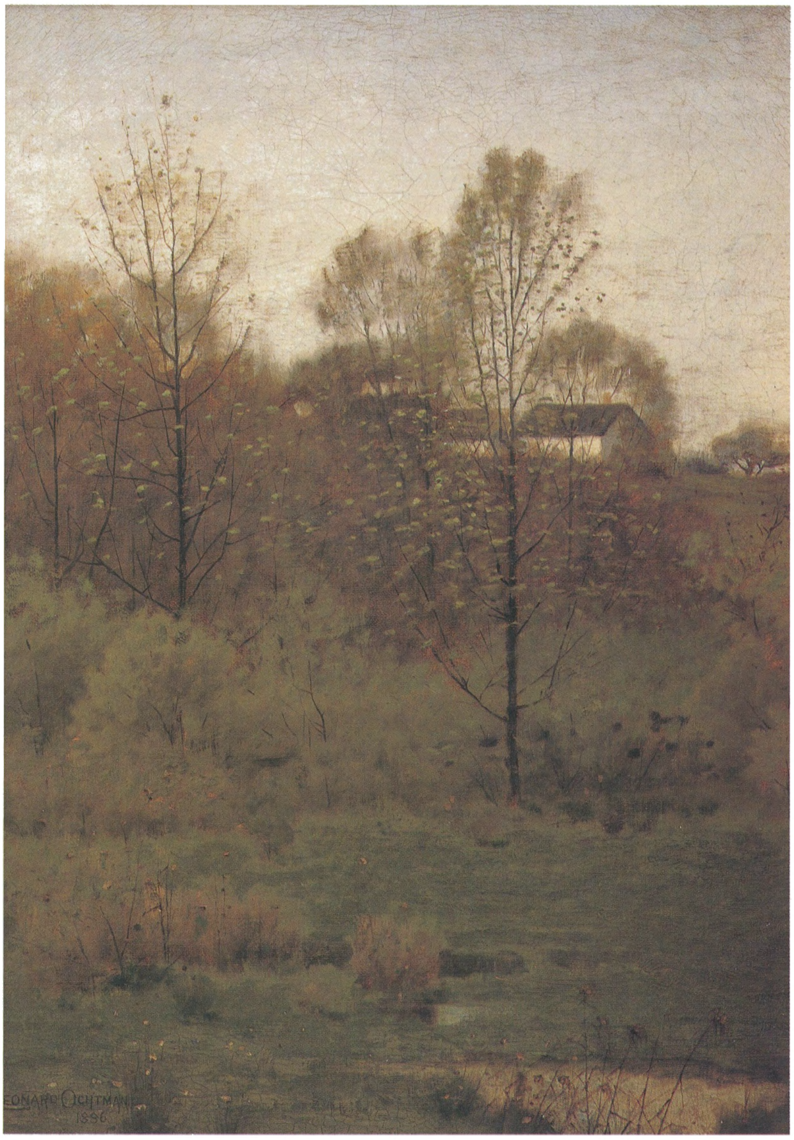


Fig. 5.112. Leonard Ochtman, *Spring Pasture*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 22 x 16 in. Private collection.

before returning to Albany and setting up a studio. Not until 1885 did he join Charles Warren Eaton and Ben Foster in New York, sharing a studio, exhibiting, and teaching on the side. Ochtman, like Eaton, began by painting fairly conventional small landscapes, refined and elegant, and appealing to the growing taste for the exquisite, well-designed object. Ochtman, though imitative to a degree, whether of Eaton or Inness, or more likely Whistlerian models, seemed able to evolve rapidly and paint in varying styles with equal facility. *A Red Sunset*, 1885 (fig. 5.111), is a lush and moody autumnal rhapsody, much in the tenor of what Eaton was doing at the time. Its admixture of soft-edged, low-hued tonalities and delicate points of detail in the foreground flowers produce a somber pictorial poetry of burnished red and russet. And yet, Ochtman's *Spring Pasture*, 1886 (fig. 5.112), painted only a year later than *A Red Sunset*, displays a quantum leap of engaging insight: at once novel, fascinating, and utterly bewitching. On the simplest level, *Spring Pasture* is a deeply affectionate rendition of seasonal transition—the budding leaves of spring, which in lesser hands or absent a singularity of vision might have amounted to little more than cliché. But the unusual, almost forced verticality of the composition not only emphasizes the traceries of the tree forms but also renders the whole a somewhat peculiar decorative assemblage of landscape ornamentation. The eye wanders, not toward some recessional vanishing point as in a typical vertical work, but bottom to top and top to bottom,

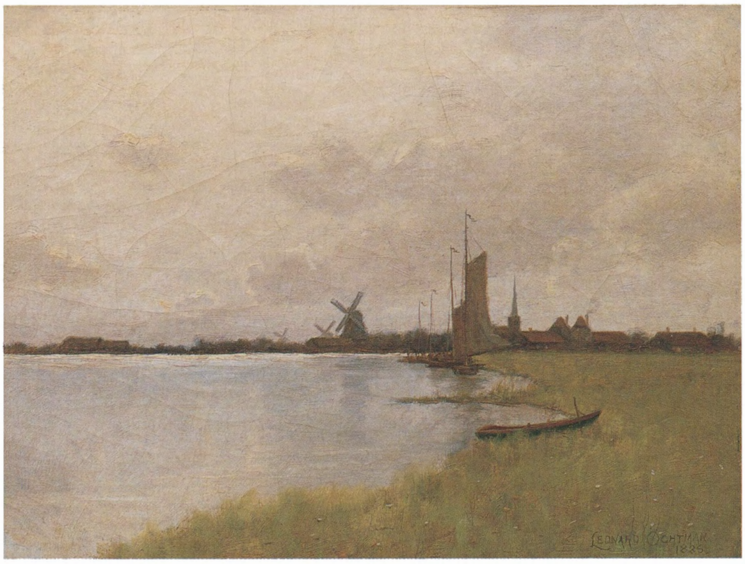


Fig. 5.113. Leonard Ochtman, *Dutch Landscape*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

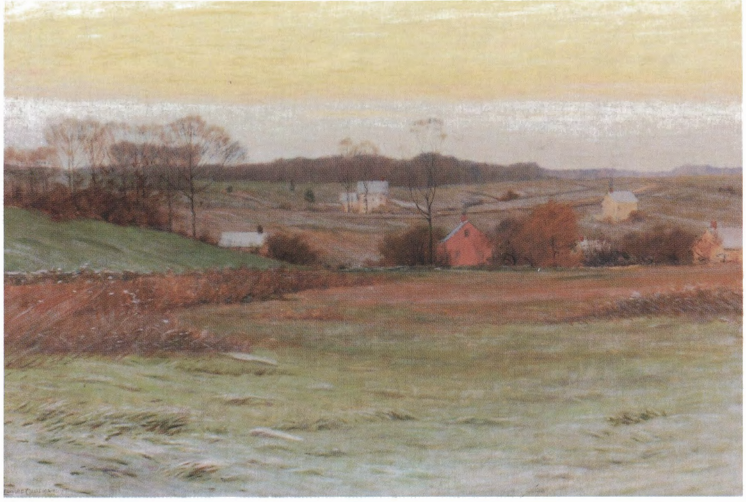


Fig. 5.114. Leonard Ochtman, *Daybreak*, c. 1894. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Collection of Susan G. and James T. Larkin.

so that the flat and narrow plane of the canvas and the formal pattern structure attract maximum scrutiny. This artificial stacking of elements, beginning with the hallmark foreground wildflowers of Aesthetic Tonalism, the gleaming pool, the lush grass hummocks, the soft-edged, blurred bushes, stone walls, and trees rising up the gentle hillside to the farm buildings beyond, where the fantails of early blossoms whisper against the porcelain blue sky, emphasizes the ornamental quality of the composition. It has the beauty of the flattened designs in an Oriental carpet, or the homespun patterning associated with a craft object—something of the grace and purity of Shaker design—but transformed by the decorative sophistication derived from the Aesthetic movement. The sumptuous spectrum of green tones blends to create an atmospheric envelope of lucent power, out of which the flowers, grasses, and trees emerge as if from a dewy spring mist, further projecting their enchanting symbolic power. *Spring Pasture* captures in paint the emotional quality of the season, not so much in descriptive terms, not simply the scene's inherent reality, but in celebration of the season's enduring symbols enhanced in form, rhythm, and pattern: totemic reminders of spring's perennial powers of renewal.

In 1886, Ochtman and Eaton traveled in Europe together, where they met up with fellow artist Ben Foster, who was studying in Paris for a year. Ochtman's *Dutch Landscape*, 1886 (fig. 5.113), is an exquisite souvenir of the ancestral homeland to which the artist was returning for the first time since age twelve. The soft, saturating white haze of the humid lowlands of the Dutch countryside is captured with utmost simplicity—the same silvery atmosphere that so inspired the Hague School artists, along with Twachtman, J. Alden Weir, Dennis Miller Bunker, and Charles Platt in their travels of about the same time. Although windmills are identified on the horizon, anchoring the narrative context, the real subject is the quality of subdued shimmering light, the humid enveloping atmosphere—perhaps couched in nostalgia for childhood—that would haunt Ochtman's work for decades to come. When Ochtman and Eaton returned to New York in the fall of 1886, inspired by all they had seen in the painting grounds and museums of Europe, they were fully prepared to take on the American art world on their own terms.

In 1891, Ochtman married and moved to the Mianus section of Greenwich, Connecticut, retaining a studio and presence in New York but reorienting his life and art to the rural countryside, which would remain his focus for the remainder of his career. Later in 1896, Ochtman moved to nearby Cos Cob, close to fellow artist John Henry Twachtman. As J. Francis Murphy (a friend who proposed Ochtman for membership in the Salmagundi Club) had moved to the Catskills and Tryon to South Dartmouth, so Ochtman made the old pastures and rural vistas of winding roads and gentle hills along the Long Island Sound the hunting ground for his art. An article in *Brush and Pencil* commented in 1901, "He early learned the lesson that so many artists find it difficult to master, that a painter can interpret most sympathetically, and render most truthfully and forcefully, those scenes with which he is most familiar."[112] Such infatuation and familiarity with home ground yielded Ochtman's best painting and watercolors of the 1890s: "a home that he knows intimately and deeply loves . . . and cast over them the spell of his own thought and feeling."[113] *Daybreak*, circa 1894 (fig. 5.114), is a lush example of Ochtman's landscapes of the 1890s, combining a poetic mix of shimmering, vibrant tones and decorative detail to give delight in what otherwise might be a run-of-the-mill landscape. Here, the artist has raised his Whistlerian penchant for captivating design and pattern structure to another level from his earlier *Spring Pasture*, turning the Connecticut hills, tree lines, stone walls, and farm buildings into a bewitching brew of intersecting planes and carefully orchestrated soft- and hard-edged forms. *Winter Morning*, 1898 (fig. 5.115), is a bravura example of vigorous paint handling and Ochtman's long-term love affair with the winter scene, here concentrating on a mix of fetching detail and sumptuous tonalities and decorative surface textures that allows the picture to work and engage on multiple visual levels. *The Orchard*, 1890–1900 (fig. 5.116), again displays Ochtman's versatility as he moves away from the more purely decorative formats of his earlier work, indulging in lush paint handling and expressive facture to capture the warm atmosphere of spring sunlight. This more painterly approach, though conventional in format, allows the artist to create an array of surface textures, vibrant tonalities, and soft-edged melting forms that raise his subject to a sublime evocation of time and place.

By 1900, Ochtman was riding high in the American art world, already a member of the Society of American Artists by 1891, and soon to be an academician at the National Academy of Design. In 1902 he would win the Morgan Water Color Prize at the Salmagundi Club and the Shaw Fund Prize at the society ("A picture bought by the Shaw Fund this year is Leonard Ochtman's 'Early Morning,' a landscape full of the quiet poetry this painter commands when he is at his very best"[114]); in 1903, the Inness Gold Medal at the academy and the Evans Prize at the society; and in 1904, the Webb Prize at the society ("Autumn Sunrise, one of these sympathetic bits of nature for which he has an uncommonly delicate feeling, a landscape that shows the quiet and crisp air of morning in a composition which is very true to facts on the Atlantic seaboard. Mr. Andrew Carnegie has bought this fine work of art for $1,000"[115]). More prizes would follow in the decades to come, including membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1908. Many of these prizewinning works remain unlocated and at least one was badly damaged.[116]

Autumn Interior, circa 1900–1905 (fig. 5.117), gives some idea of Ochtman's post–1900 style, in which the artist broadened and strengthened his approach to form, while defining and integrating his more sinewy landscape elements in beautifully modulated tonal clusters, retaining significant detail with an exquisitely orchestrated atmospheric feel. The painting displays the artist's ability, in a tiny horizontal composition, to play on the possibilities of a traditional forest enclosure by creating a zigzag recessional perspective that leads the eye into the woods as if by a wandering path. Carefully plotted highlights of dappled sunlight and the glint of silver birch in the distance act as points of interest, pulling the gaze in a leisurely circuitous route that emphasizes less the facts of nature, as the scintillating moments of gestural brushwork. It is another example of the Tonalists' penchant for creating a kind of natural garden within the wild. Ochtman's mixture of boldness and reticence of spirit, simplicity and straightforwardness, and "truthful rendering"

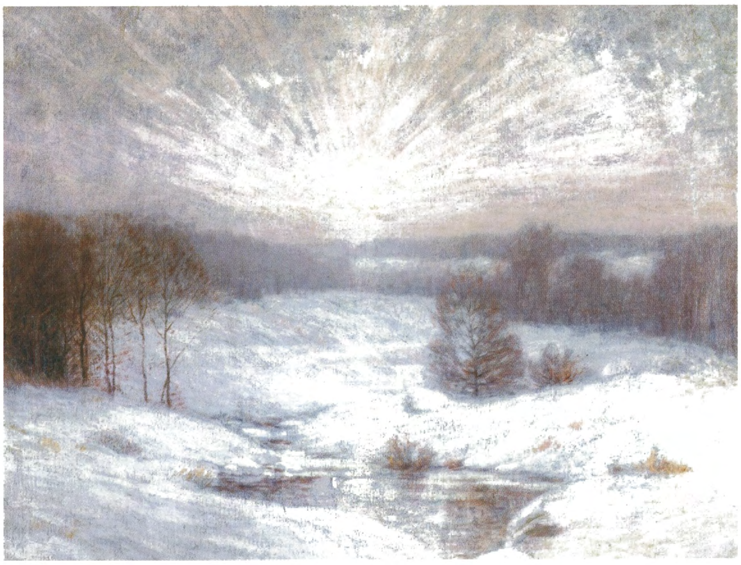


Fig. 5.115. Leonard Ochtman, *Winter Morning*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in. Courtesy Becker Ventures.

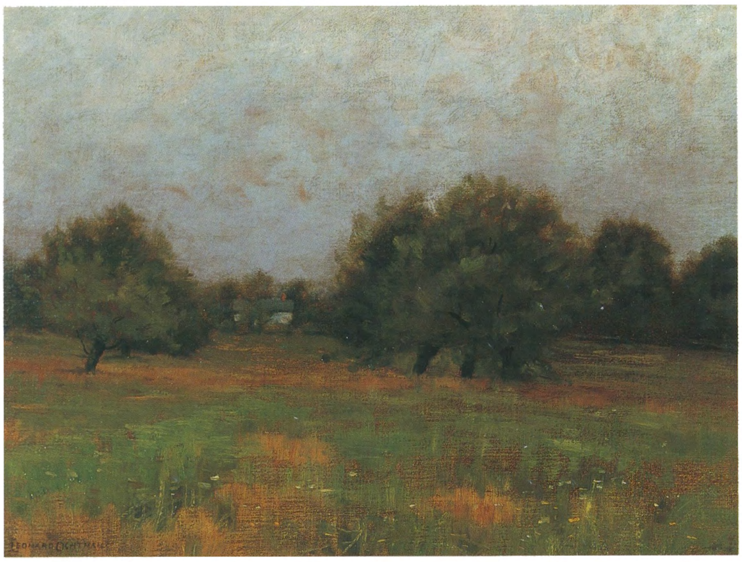


Fig. 5.116. Leonard Ochtman, *The Orchard*, c. 1890–1900. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. The O'Brien Collection of American Art, Sewickley, PA.

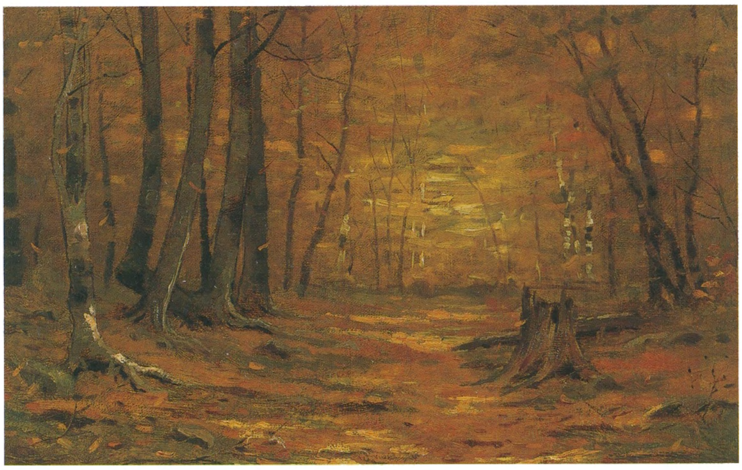


Fig. 5.117. Leonard Ochtman, *Autumn Interior*, c. 1900–1905. Oil on canvas, 10 x 16 in. Private collection.

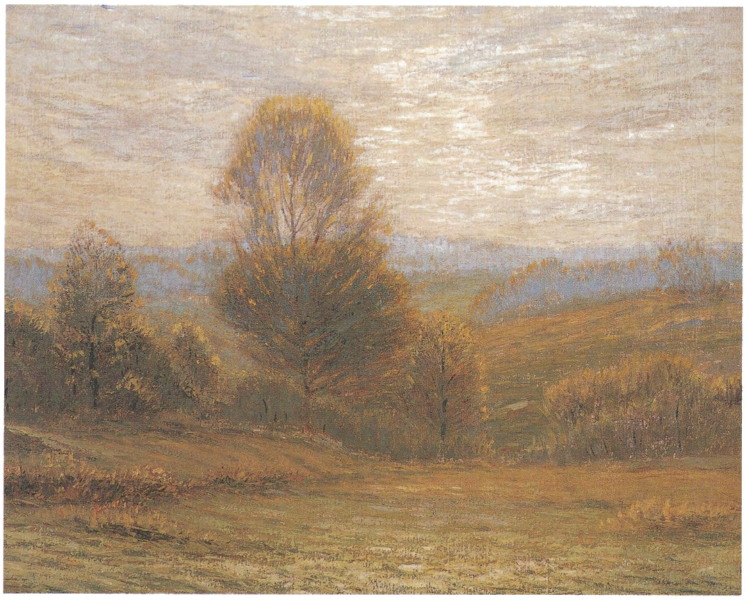


Fig. 5.118. Leonard Ochtman, *Spring Colors*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Private collection.

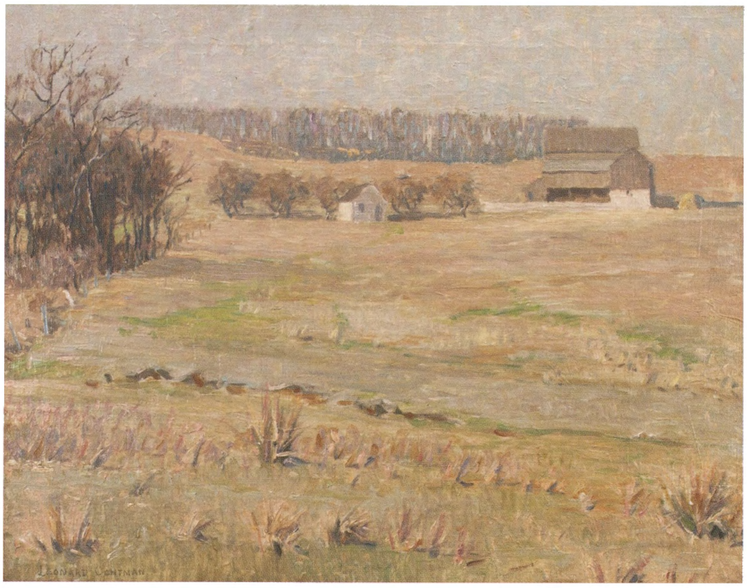


Fig. 5.119. Leonard Ochtman, *Summer Meadow*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 19 x 24 in. Private collection.

was highly valued after the turn of the century when he was known as the "prince of American landscape-painters," and the "Keats of landscape."[117]

Ochtman moved increasingly to a broader style of broken brushstrokes and emphasis on larger forms in his late work, which approximates the look of Impressionist facture but has little connection to the formal tenets of Impressionism. *Spring Colors*, circa 1905 (fig. 5.118), is fine example of the artist's late style in which the broadly modulated landscape forms provide both visual interest—the meandering shapes and patterns provide a sumptuous fascination—and an overarching sense of mood, of time and place, and "the subtle beauty of tone," that critics pointed to again and again as his enduring strength. *Summer Meadow*, circa 1910 (fig. 5.119), though less decorative in design and a far remove from his earlier *Spring Colors*, also provides telling decorative touches in the tree lines and the stubble patches of meadow grasses, which lead the eye through the foreground and into the distance. A touch of realistic detailing in the farm buildings on the right horizon anchors the visual interest, the more concrete forms offering a dynamic contrast with the dispersed and diffuse landscape elements. Between 1900 and 1910, Ochtman's fifteen awards in major competitions made him, by some estimates, one of the most famous artists of the day. *A Silent Morning*, 1909 (see p. 570), exhibited at the National Academy in 1909 and bought by the Columbus Museum of Art in 1910, is a masterful example of the artist's late period style and fluid paint handling. Ochtman uses dynamic, expressive brushwork and rugged, textured pigment to render a scene at once sublimely quiet yet powerfully dramatic. His emphasis on the horizontal design of bare tree trunks and the rich, russet tones of the exposed ground of the canvas give the composition unity and atmospheric warmth, a culmination of not just Ochtman's art but of Expressive Tonalism and the heady transformations the style undergoes in its evolution from the intimacies of Aesthetic Tonalism.

Ben Foster (1852–1926)

Unlike Leonard Ochtman and Charles Warren Eaton, Ben Foster (fig. 5.120) made the transition from Aesthetic Tonalism to Expressive Tonalism much earlier and with greater conviction. His paint handling had a visceral ruggedness and

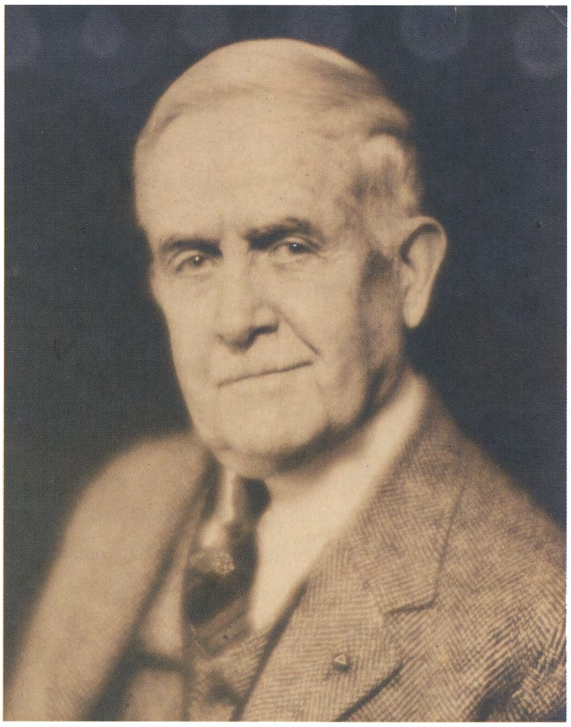


Fig. 5.120. Undated photograph of Ben Foster, 1923. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

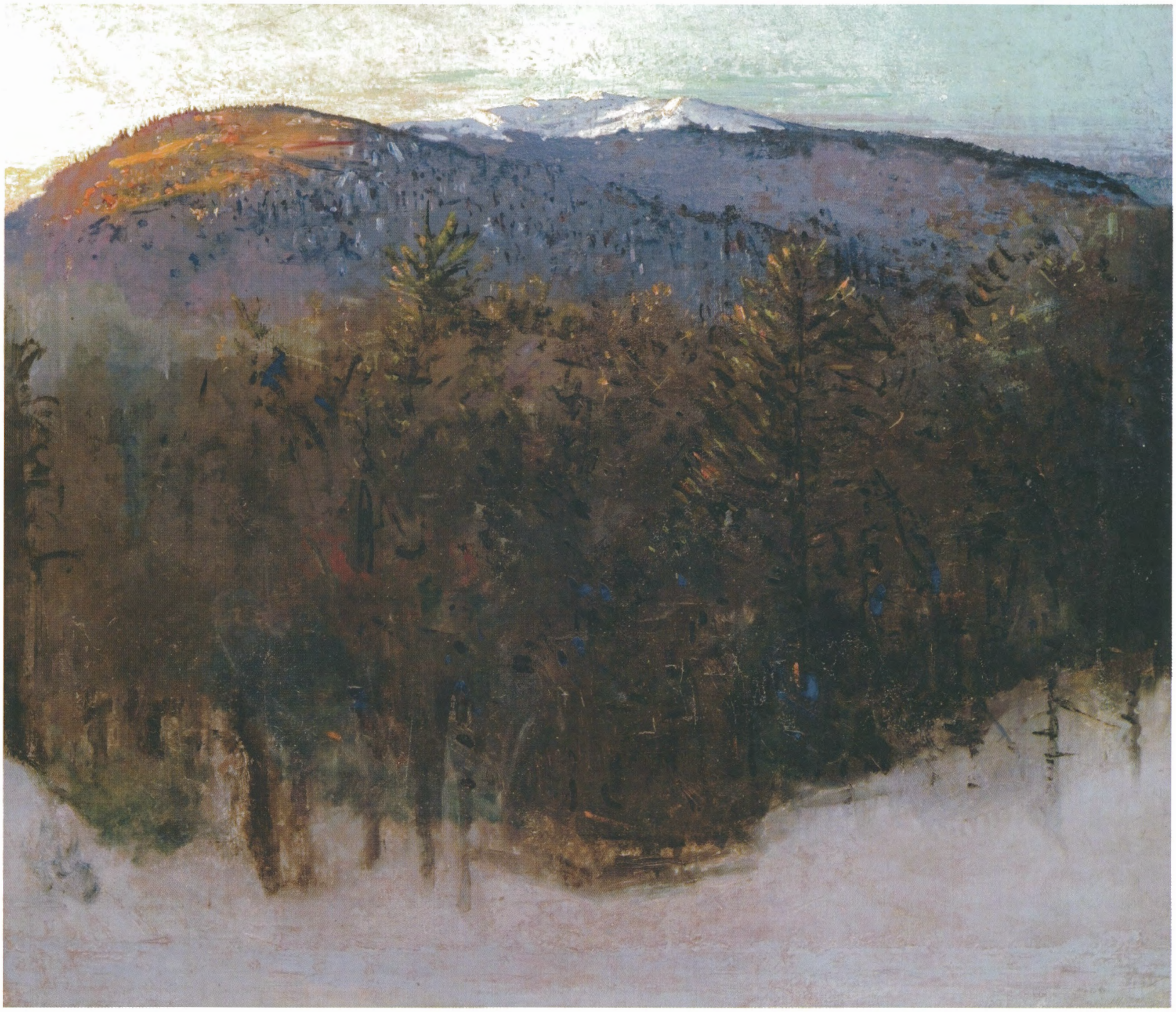


Fig. 5.121. Abbott Thayer, *Monadnock, Winter Sunrise*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 52.4 x 62 in. Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Frank Jewett Mather, Jr.

rawness that earned him wide distinction in his day. Strangely, given the modernist impulses in his work, Ben Foster may be the most underappreciated and underrated of the major Tonalist landscapists born between 1840 and 1865, yet his art is psychologically compelling and emotionally complex, on a par with the best artists of his generation. His finest works have a brooding melancholy and a haunting off-kilter perspective that put him in the league with the best fin-de-siècle Expressive Symbolists, American or European. Foster's fame came relatively late at age forty-eight in 1900 when he won an award in Paris. His posthumous reputation may have suffered from the fact that he died a bachelor without a family to keep his flame alive. Foster was also a late bloomer; he was late to get started on his artistic career, moving to New York from Maine in 1870 at age twenty-eight, working a day job and studying privately with Abbott Thayer and at the Art Students League; and he was late to find his landscape métier after spending much of the 1880s specializing in floral still lifes. He spent a year studying in France, but his style shows less in the way of academic precision and more of a distinctive self-generated broad and painterly style, perhaps initially influenced by his still life work of flowers and the expressive facture of Thayer, whose Tonalist landscapes are marvels of bravura paint handling verging on near abstraction (*Monadnock, Winter Sunrise*, 1919, fig. 5.121).

Nonetheless, a small landscape, *Spring Reflections*, circa 1885 (fig. 5.122), indicates the ways in which Foster was aligned with his friends and studio-mates, Eaton and Ochtman, in their early careers and with the development of Aesthetic Tonalism. *Spring Reflections* displays all the rarefied decorative poetics of the Aesthetic movement, a style that was all pervasive at the Art Students League in the mid-1880s. This exquisite rendering of the nearby landscape, bathed in shimmering veils of fading light, in which delicate blossoms and misted passages of greens float and coruscate, seems to have been a relatively short

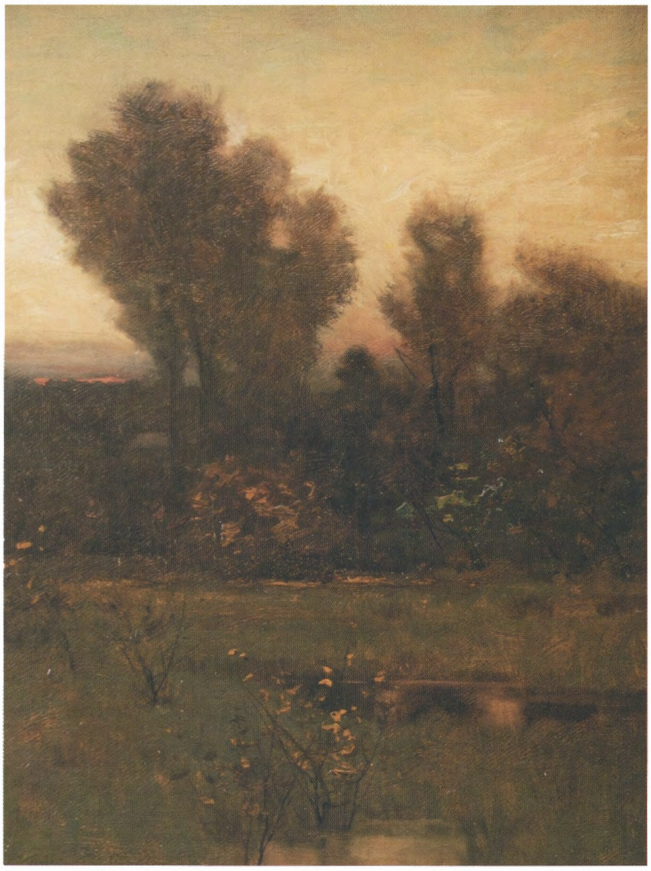


Fig. 5.122. Ben Foster, *Spring Reflections*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 8 x 11 in. Private collection.

sojourn for Foster, unlike Charles Warren Eaton and Leonard Ochtman who painted variations on Aesthetic Tonalism well into the 1890s. Perhaps because of his brief study in Paris, Foster moved quickly on to a broader, more painterly style. His *Picardy Peat Ponds*, circa 1887 (fig. 5.123), was painted during his year traveling and studying abroad with Eaton and Ochtman, in 1886–87. It was shown at the Society of American Artists' annual exhibition of 1888 and favorably noted by de Kay. *Picardy Peat Ponds* demonstrates that Foster's painterly flowing style was well established. His brush handling allows for rich, swelling impastoed surfaces, which give a certain energy and breadth of feeling to his art. There is a kind of low-simmering tension, too, in *Picardy Peat Ponds*, as the mood and silent reverie evoked by the low-toned greens and olives subsume the graphic forms and looming force of the tree line. It is as if the vitality of the natural world has been compacted, held in check, and then released again in the roiling pigment. This latent tension infuses much of Foster's best work. Like Eaton and Ochtman, Foster gravitated to a rural residence and a landscape from which he could draw sustenance. Foster settled in Cornwall Hollow along the northern reaches of the Housatonic River in Connecticut, dividing his time between his New York studio and his country retreat and visits to his boyhood home in Maine. Much of his best work comes out of his familiarity and emotional associations with Cornwall Hollow, although he also did fine work farther afield in Maine and California.

Although Foster was represented by four works in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, it was not until the late 1890s that the critics began to comment in earnest about his work. In 1896 at the society exhibition the *New York Times* critic noted, "Ben Foster, working with much seriousness, shows each year steady progress in the best of directions, and this time his canvas, 'Close of a Rainy Day,' reaches a high level. The motive is simple; there are some trees, a wet road, reflecting here and there a murky sky, lit at one point by a gleam of light. The picture has tonal qualities that are effective, with a rich color sense in the painting, and the work holds well together."[118] The next year one of his works at the society was praised for its, "soft and lovely tones."[119] And in 1899, Foster was praised at the society: "all good tonal studies, refined in treatment, and tender in sentiment and feeling."[120] In 1900 the *New York Times* critic, Charles de Kay, opined that Foster should have won the Webb Prize that year, though being over forty he was technically barred from the prize. But a much bigger prize awaited Foster in Paris that year when he won a bronze medal at the Exposition Universelle for *Bercé par le murmure d'un ruisseau* (*Lulled by a Murmuring Stream*), 1899 (fig. 5.124), which subsequently was bought by the French government for the Luxembourg Museum. Only three other American artists were so honored that year, including Homer, whose haunting *Summer Night* (now in the Musée

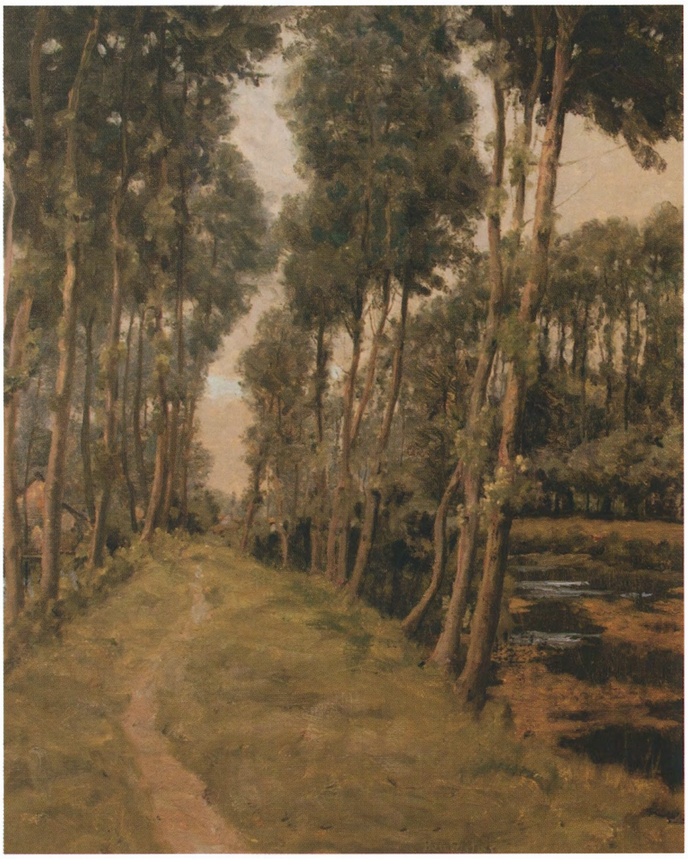


Fig. 5.123. Ben Foster, *Picardy Peat Ponds*, c. 1887. Oil on canvas, 22 x 18 in. Private collection.

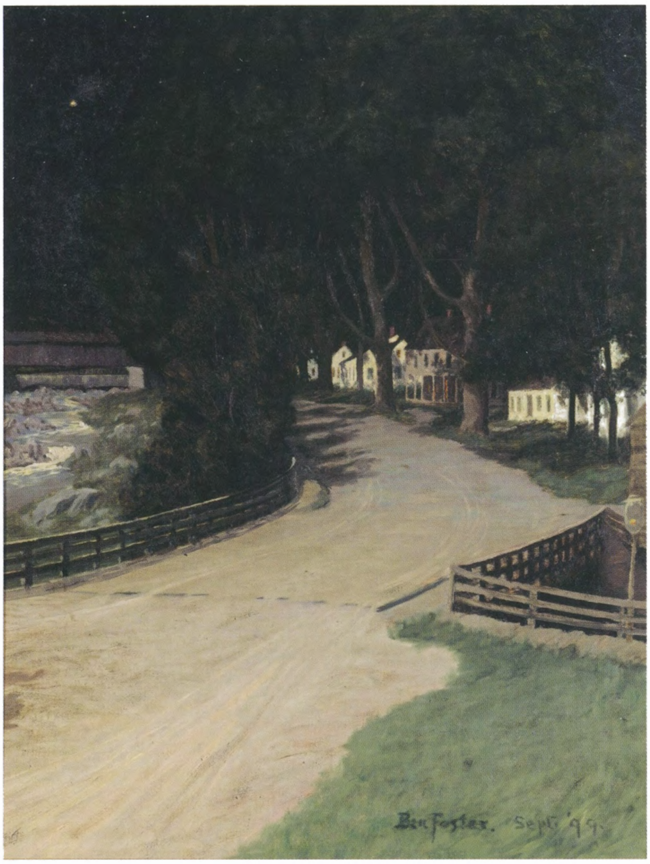


Fig. 5.124. Ben Foster, *Bercé par le murmure d'un ruisseau* (*Lulled by a Murmuring Stream*), 1899. Oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm. (36 x 28 in.) Inv.: FR1980-103. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

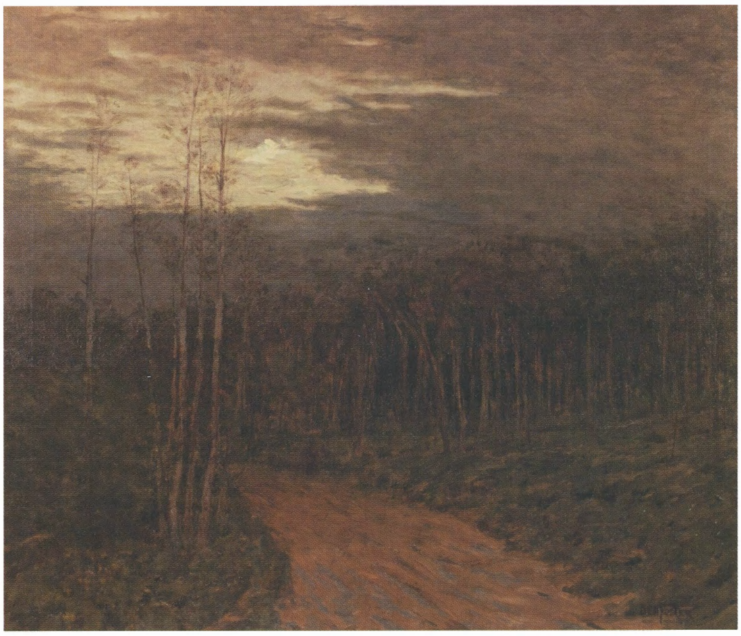


Fig. 5.125. Ben Foster, *Moonlit Road*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 30 x 34 in. Private collection.

d'Orsay, Paris) was also purchased for the Luxembourg. Both purchases, the Foster and the Homer, were nocturnes much in the vein of what Whistler was doing and evocative of symbolist themes then coming into vogue and found on the gallery walls throughout the Paris Exposition Universelle. Foster's moonlit road winding through a New England town, probably somewhere along the Housatonic, was admired by the French for its peculiar American poetry and brooding melancholy. Foster, consciously or not, was drawn to the same themes as European Symbolist painters who specialized in nocturnes with shadowy reflections and indistinct forms, placing him in the thick of the modernist movements of his day and the growing preoccupations among artists, writers, and thinkers with altered psychological states and dreams. A year later in 1901, the society awarded Foster the Webb Prize for landscape (the under-40 criterion—a stipulation for the prize—was dropped to make the award possible); Charles de Kay in the *New York Times* suggested that Foster's *Mists of the Morning* was so acknowledged by the society, "to mark the appreciation on the part of his fellow-artists of a very decided bound forward in his work as a landscapist."[121] *Moonlit Road*, circa 1900 (fig. 5.125), again demonstrates the artist's preoccupation in this period with subjects evocative of dreams and mystery. The great curve of the nearly indistinct road, the blurred mass of dark trees in the middle ground, and the slender shape of a foreground tree rising against a fragmented aperture of moonlit clouds create a powerful undercurrent of wonderment mixed with trepidation: beauty and anxiety, freedom and confinement—all the stuff of troubled dreams. Foster's combination of rough and smooth, of fluid and jarring paint handling, only adds to the spooky amorphousness of his atmospheric envelope—and the dramatic immediacy of the image.

Charles de Kay's *New York Times* review of an exhibition of Ben Foster's works in 1900 offers a glimpse of the kind of reputation Foster enjoyed and how his work resonated with his contemporaries. De Kay described Foster as "distinctly a poetical painter," ranking with Tryon, Ochtman, and Charles Melville Dewey, a painter with "an indefinable personal poetical sense," and a recent winner of a silver medal at the Carnegie Institute. Foster's paintings are described as, "full of poetry and sentiment, dignified in treatment, and rich and sober in color . . . harmonious in tone, with rich and luscious greens . . . delicious feeling and sentiment and characteristic mysteriousness in the painting of the night."[122]

In the decades after 1900, Foster's paint handling became increasingly gestural and expressive, often laid on in masses of thick pigment, while the artist's depiction of form became less dependent on detailed rendering and more akin to calligraphic paint marks, lending his repertoire of trees, boulders, stone walls, and undulating hillocks a new dynamic and pronounced symbolic quality. This greater reliance on symbolic language is enhanced by a rare combination of sumptuous tonality within strangely unbalanced compositional formats—and the increasing use of square canvases. Many of his works appear awkward on first viewing, but more familiarity produces an uncanny sense of disquiet, further challenging the observer to discover a satisfactory read of his pictorial arrangements.

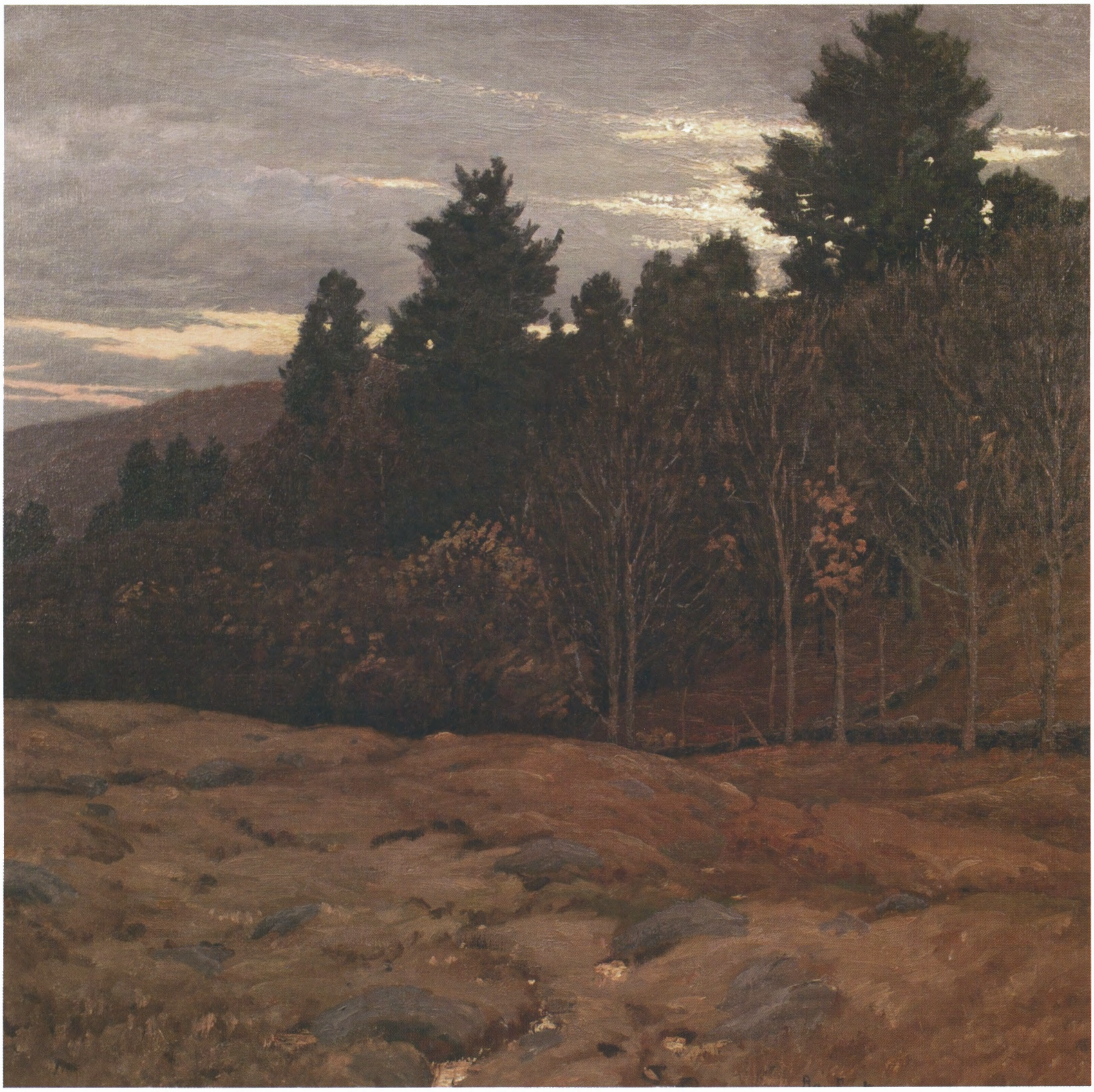


Fig. 5.126. Ben Foster, *Waning Day*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in. Private collection.

Something of Foster's brooding restlessness was noted by a *New York Times* reviewer (very likely de Kay) in a discussion of the 1908 academy exhibition in which the young upstarts like George Bellows, Jonas Lie, Ernest Lawson, and Rockwell Kent are praised for their vigorous and virile painterly expressions."Thus every rebel has his day, and we look to the newcomers to stir our pulse and keep the good fight going... One must not forget, however, such men as Ben Foster, in whom resides a fine sense of the poetic aspects of nature well exemplified in the soft moonlit 'Night' with the jewel-like stars twinkling over the tops of the solemn pine trees that point their shadows into the lily-covered pond in the foreground. This painting like most of Mr. Foster's work has a persuasive power of evocation seldom to be found in the work of to-day."[123] *Waning Day*, 1916 (fig. 5.126), is a prime example of Foster's "persuasive power of evocation," and the way in which the artist managed late in his career to combine a new vigor of graphic imagery with the tonal poetry of his earlier work. The painting reads, unlike much of Foster's late work, with a conventional equilibrium and poise, a coherence reinforced by the all-pervasive atmospheric envelope that mutes and merges the broadly painted foreground and background forms into a seamless unity. A singular feeling of harmony prevails, neatly capped by the stately pines against the gray chinks of fading sky.

A more psychologically challenging and vigorous late work is *Silent Creek*, circa 1910 (fig. 5.127), in which traditional representation and modernist ambiguity coexist in uneasy equilibrium. Foster has transformed what in lesser hands would be a typically picturesque scene into something approaching a visionary dream, where formalist compositional complexities challenge the eye in dozens of puzzling juxtapositions—contrasts of forms and colors and off-kilter spatial relations. Spindly tree trunks spring forth from the near and far bank of the meandering stream creating strange geometries, and airy windows that overlap foreground and background planes and shuffle the vantage point. The central birch tree—neatly dividing the composition—teeters forward into the viewer's space, almost breaking out of the invisible plane of the canvas, and shimmers with silvery-gold highlights. The vertical lines of the tree trunks frame mini-vignettes, some of them almost photo-realistic, like the fir tree along the distant left bank of the stream, or the stark boulders in the near foreground—almost underfoot—composed of swirling masses of creamy impasto. Foster's rocks, tree trunks, and branching forms, display both rugged, expressive facture and delicate, detailed filigree, which in turn—especially the three dimensional clash of soft- and hard-edged forms—set up jarring if exquisite vibrations of convergent tones, thus evoking an uncannily animate yet invisible life-force: Inness's unseen. The artist's virtuoso brushwork further vitalizes his subjects and hints at a sinewy subterfuge of motion: the perennial metamorphic unfolding of growth, decay, and death. It is this visual conundrum, the contradiction of discovering movement in a—seemingly static and very quiet—painted landscape that keeps the viewer off balance and it is why Foster's best paintings never read the same way twice. There is no comforting equilibrium to them.

Silent Creek can be interpreted in terms of standard metaphors about time and memory replete in the literary culture of the day. Matthew Arnold's poem, "The Future," which begins: "A wanderer is man from his birth. He was born in a ship/On the breast of the River of Time. . . ." was so well known that Charles de Kay could paraphrase it in a 1912 review and

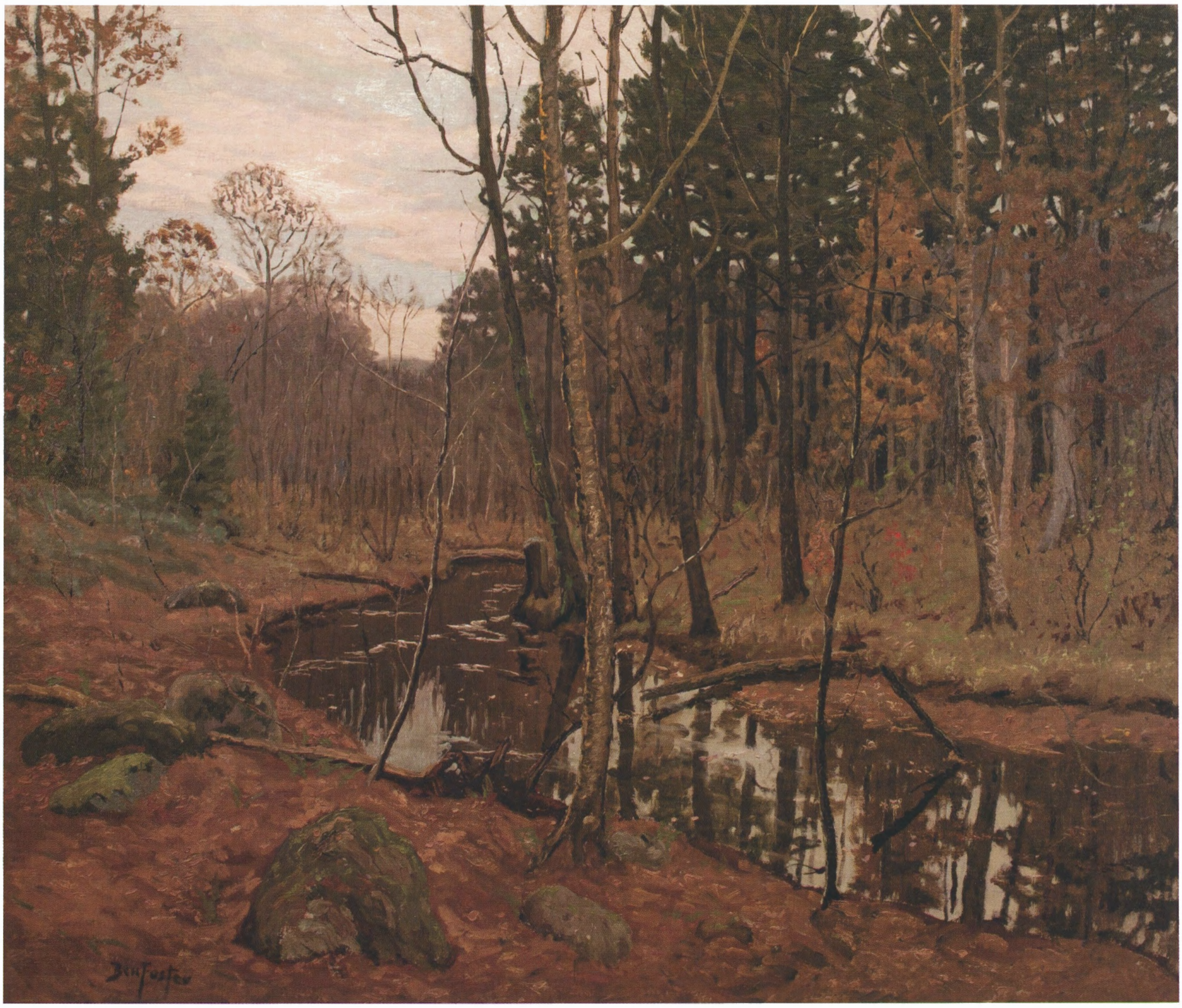


Fig. 5.127. Ben Foster, *Silent Creek*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 36 x 42 in. Private collection.

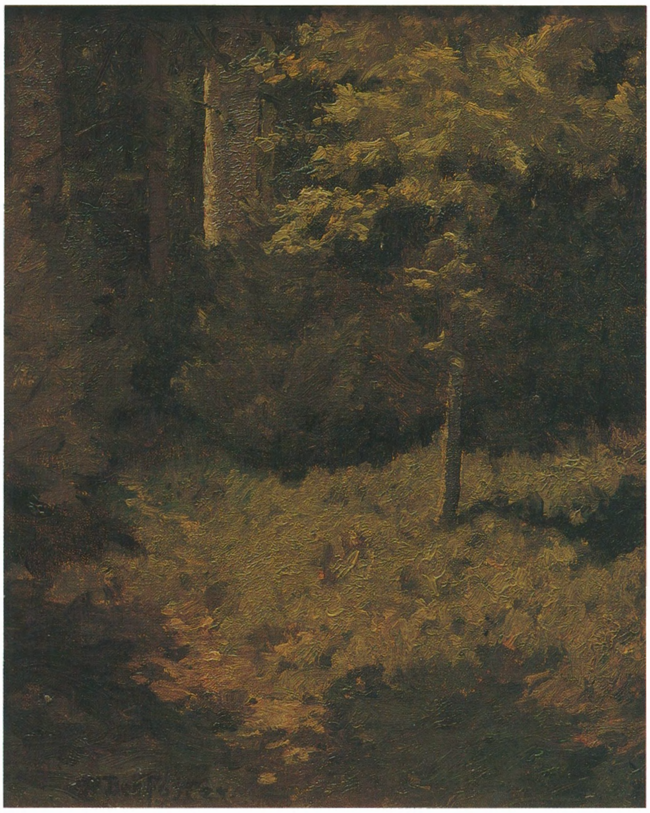


Fig. 5.128. Ben Foster, *Tree Shadows*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 14 x 12 in. Private collection.

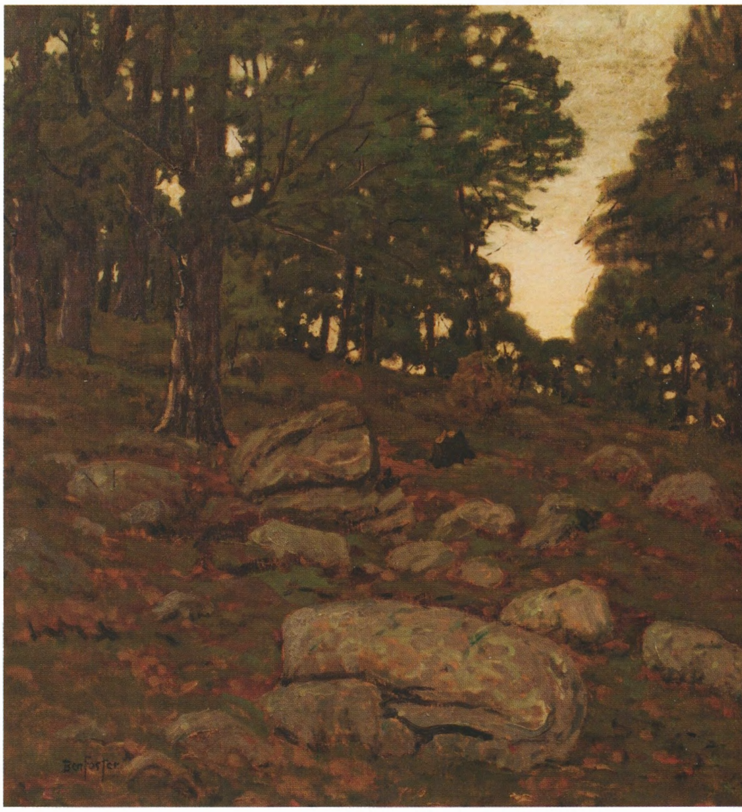


Fig. 5.129. Ben Foster, *Rocky Hill*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 30 x 30 in. Private collection.

his readers would immediately understand the analogy.[124] The commonplace associations with the stages of life, of time past, present, and future that Arnold describes can be read into *Silent Creek*, and would certainly resonate in the late-Victorian mind. A stopping place, a place of beauty and silence and enduring time suggests, as it did for Arnold, that the only world one can ever know is that which one has experienced, and one searches in vain for what has gone before and what will come after: "Vainly does each as he glides, Fable and dream/Of the lands which the River of Time/Had left ere he woke on its breast/Or shall reach when his eyes have been clos'd." In this context, *Silent Creek*, as does any painting, represents an eternal present. Foster's genius was to portray this miraculous moment of clairvoyant insight in which the disjunction of a lifetime's layered memories, these jumbled palimpsests of visual information, haunt our gaze. It is a Proustian moment: we stumble on a place we feel we should know, perhaps from unconscious childhood memories, but cannot fully recall. By providing a context for such visual symbols that trigger a meditative spirit, Foster pursued lines of the modernist ethos that Marcel Proust spearheaded. The various layers of memory—the ever-flowing, multi-layered fountain of awareness, as Proust observed time and time again—imposed upon any visual feeling often results in a disquieting experience, as various memories refuse to compose or coalesce, thus the jarring discontinuity that colors such perceptions with ambiguity and the disequilibrium so often found in Foster's work. *Tree Shadows*, circa 1910 (fig. 5.128), achieves similar results on a smaller scale: the strange high vantage point, the mysterious shadows, the cropped angle, the mysterious path to nowhere—the off-balance quirkiness is unavailing to logic. These inevitable disjunctions, often the most profound revelations of solitude in nature, were the core emotions the Tonalists sought to portray in their landscapes. This was accomplished by the ambiguities of soft-edged symbolic forms and palpable atmosphere—the invisible made visible, just as memory is invisible and often irrecoverable but undeniably real and emotionally compelling. Such paradoxes and ambiguities lie at the heart, too, of so many of Thoreau's insights, and invoke the visual metaphors that make *Silent Creek* so compelling. As Thoreau put it while contemplating his beloved Concord River, "As yesterday and the historical ages are past, as the work of to-day is present, so some flitting perspectives, and demi-experiences of the life that is in nature are, in time, veritably future, or rather outside to time, perennial, young, divine, in the wind and rain which never die."[125] *Silent Creek* simply mirrors to the mind the inherent and irreconcilable ambiguities of existence, and perhaps the comfort and joy that meditation on beauty, however fleeting and problematic, provides.

Other Foster paintings like *Rocky Hill*, circa 1910 (fig. 5.129), and *Dusk Amidst the Pines*, circa 1910 (fig. 5.130), further demonstrate the artist's emotional investment in disquieting angles of perception—"his indefinable personal poetical sense." The hilly countryside of his home in Cornwall Hollow seemed aptly chosen to challenge Foster to seek out vantage points of perceptual insight. In *Rocky Hill* the granite outcroppings loom and weightily impose themselves as living manifestations of the upsurging earth, reminders, like pagan totems, of mythic time. The lush roiling greens of the hillside tempt our ascent as the great boulders do our oblations. Staring up past these craggy-faced eminences—mimicked with silvery slabs of impasto—to the distant pine-shadowed sky, the observer feels somewhat overwhelmed, a mortal supplicant before the high temple of an imposing and majestic nature. *Dusk Amidst the Pines* offers a reverse angle, a hard-won airy perch on the heights with a view of the orange-tinged treetops against a sunset sky. But even with a bird's-eye view, nature refuses to be an easygoing presence. The downward slant constitutes a kind of parallax displacement; we experience the stark trunks of the white pine both in craggy-faced proximity, the inner gloom of their shadowy interior, and, in the same instant, at airy remove, where the upper boughs feather the skies with their luxuriant greens, dusted in sunset's fading glow. Foster gives us nature both in gritty proximity and at a spiritualizing distance.

Foster's uncompromising visions of disequilibrium are often hard to love. His unbalanced, sometimes ungainly compositions do not settle easily in the mind, and the eye struggles for an often unavailing clarification of intent. Rarely classically beautiful or handsomely proportioned, his rugged landforms and equally scabrous impasto are a challenge for the uninitiated to love unconditionally; they were painted for a generation that liked to get at the sinew and bone of the natural world—to gnaw the bone of nature as Thoreau, and later Darwin, would have it—and who understood nature as Foster understood it, in all its uncompromising mystery, in which life and death, creation and chaos, dwell a hair's breadth apart. There is something, too, of the post–Civil War Whitman in Foster's landscape poetry, of a witness to immeasurable suffering, who nevertheless finds human comfort even in the discordances of nature.

If Foster's subjects are nineteenth century, his ambiguity and discord is very modern, something a modern artist like Fairfield Porter (see fig. 8.154) would immediately intuit. For Foster, as was true of Tryon, the atmospheric veils of tone with which the artist tinctured the concrete realities of earth and sky, had little to do with affectation or charm, but constituted a truth unto itself: the moving, but invisible, hand of metamorphosis transforming all things. Perhaps Thoreau caught something of the wild spirit of Foster's off-kilter poetry when he wrote: "It is only necessary to behold thus the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair's breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance."[126] Or as Emily Dickinson wrote: "The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience." Such moments of ecstatic experience are found throughout Foster's work and they do jar the soul in inexplicable yet infinitely rewarding ways. Something of the profundity of Foster's spirit, much less the esteem of his colleagues, is glimpsed in a memorial notice issued by the National Arts Club upon his death in 1926, in which mention was made of his "gentleness, his humour, his wide review of events. . . ." He was further described as "the ideal type of artist, dignified, courteous, modest, original . . . ardent in seeking deeper meanings, but indifferent to the casual and popular."[127] At Foster's funeral more than a dozen artists from the National Academy acted as honorary pallbearers, including his first studiomate in New York from more than forty years before, Charles Warren Eaton.[128]

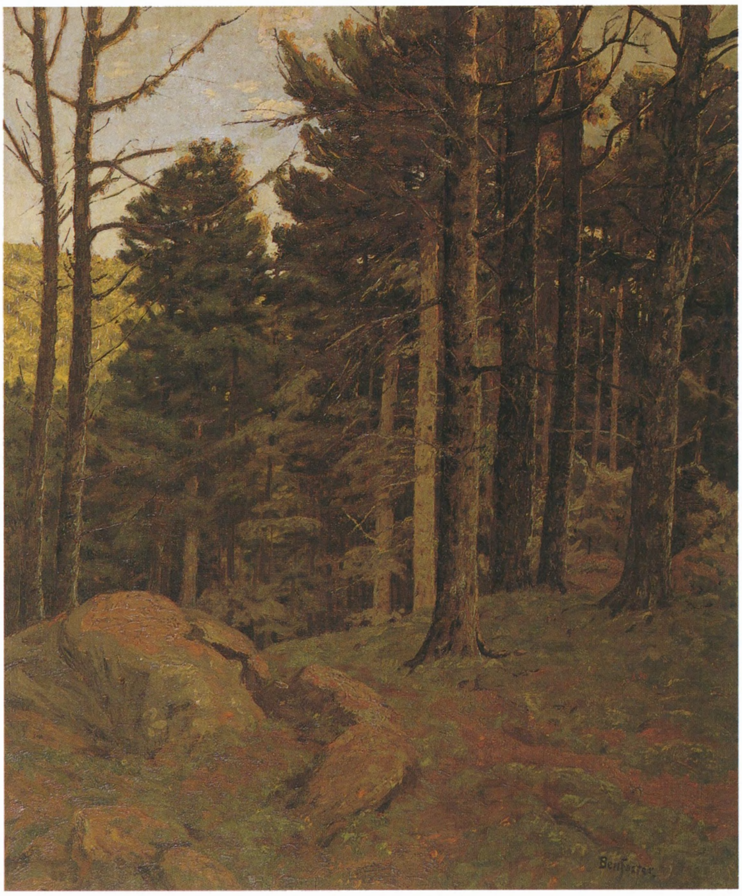
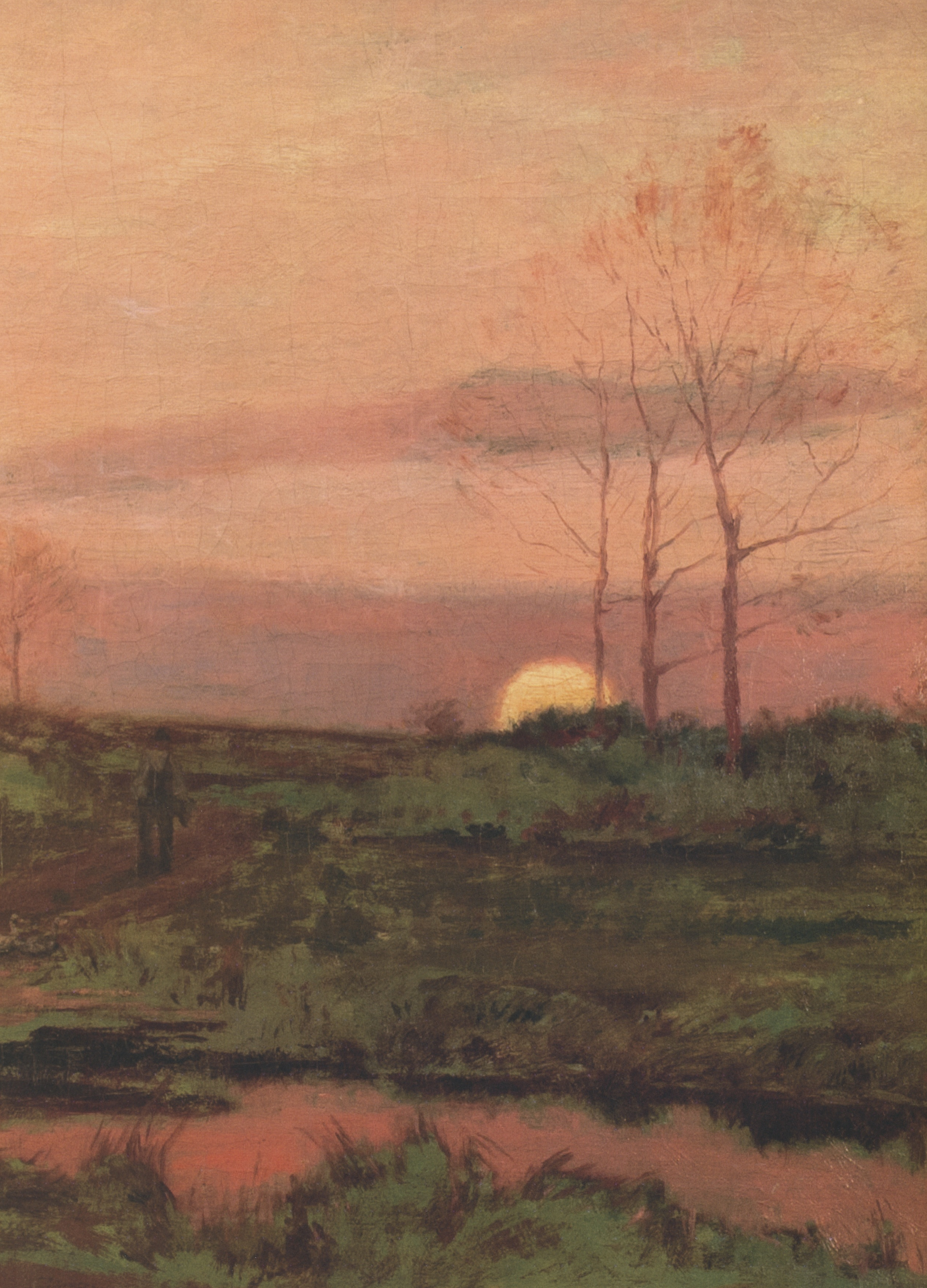


Fig. 5.130. Ben Foster, *Dusk Amidst the Pines*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in. Private collection.

With this overview of the development of the Tonalist pastel and watercolor, along with an examination of some the seminal artists in the movement, chapter 6 will offer an analysis of the major exhibitions between 1889 and 1900 that enhanced the public response to Tonalism and furthered the reputations of many of the finest artists in the movement, ultimately providing the institutional framework for the flourishing of the Tonalist landsape.



CHAPTER SIX

The Rise of the Tonalist Establishment: The Major Exhibitions, 1889–1900

THE PARIS EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE OF 1889; THE CHICAGO WORLD'S FAIR, 1893; THE LOTOS CLUB; THE PARIS EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE OF 1900

If the 1880s marked the creation and development of Tonalism, especially Aesthetic Tonalism, and the evolution of arts institutions congenial to the movement, the 1890s and the turn of the century represented the decade of its establishment and ultimate maturation across a range of major international exhibitions. These important showcases attempted to be both comprehensive of current art movements and present the finest artists in painting, sculpture, watercolor, pastel, etching, and related disciplines. Inclusion in these competitive exhibitions—career-makers for the chosen and the medalists—was a highly sought-after invitation; the political infighting for spots was always keen, and the results, though often controversial, offer a snapshot, if imperfect, of the best the American art establishment had to offer. Key events were the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889, the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. Smaller exhibitions proliferated at commercial galleries. New York's Montross Gallery had been displaying works by Dwight Tryon and Thomas Dewing in a small annex of the dealer's artists' supply store since the late 1870s. The opening of Macbeth Gallery in 1892, which specialized in Tonalist landscapes, proved to be a decisive turning point for the commercial viability of American art. In addition there were the various men's clubs in New York, which also organized numerous exhibitions. Of this group, the Lotos Club, whose membership included the best artists and the most deep-pocketed collectors of the era, under the aegis of William T. Evans, was influential; from the mid-1890s into the first decade of the new century and beyond the Lotos Club exhibitions provided an important forum for the advancement of the Tonalist landscape. Slowly but surely, the intimate Tonalist landscape became affordable art for many in the growing upper-middle class, gradually easing ahead of its European competition for the hearts and minds of the American collector. The Society of American Artists, founded in 1877, and the New York Water Color Club, organized in 1890, had both become fixtures in the art world by 1900, and boosters of the Tonalist movement, providing a momentum further enhanced by the formation of the Society of Landscape Painters in 1898. In addition, by 1900 the National Academy of Design exhibitions would be filled with Tonalist landscapes. With an economic depression beginning in 1893, it was only the largesse of major collectors like Evans, Thomas B. Clarke, Charles Freer, John Gellatly, George A. Hearn, and Edwin C. Shaw—who assembled the core of their collections in these years—that kept many artists solvent. Subsequently, it was the auctions of these significant collections, foremost those of Clarke and Evans in 1899 and 1900, that sparked the precipitous rise in prices for Tonalism in the first decades of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the major exhibitions of these years represented the pinnacle of achievement for the major Tonalist painters, and, in many minds, proof of the triumph of a distinctive American style over European competitors.

OPPOSITE: Frederick W. Kost. *Staten Island Sunset*, 1891 (detail of fig. 6.35).

The Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889

The Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889—the Universal Exposition, as opposed to the annual Salons, occurred every eleven years and represented the highest achievements of the international art scene—marked a watershed in American art. The previous exposition in 1878, had been dominated by Hudson River School landscapes by artists like Frederic Church, Albert Bierstadt, John Kensett, and Sanford Robinson Gifford. None of these artists, or even traces of their style of panoramic and detailed landscape, were represented in the American Section of the Paris Exposition in 1889. Bierstadt, who had submitted work to the jury of his peers for the exposition had been rejected. His absence was noted in a biting review in *Art Amateur*: "Being thoroughly American, it, doubtless, would have proved highly interesting to the foreign visitors to the exposition; but his fair-minded jury, which has allowed some of the younger painters to send as many as half a dozen canvases each, and has placidly admitted the work of mere novices, puts itself on record as deciding that Mr. Bierstadt, a veteran of established reputation, cannot paint well enough to earn a place even in such a miscellaneous collection of pictures as has been sent over to represent the United States at the Exposition."[1] Another commentator pointed out that the selection committee was only interested in work that demonstrated the advancement of American art made since 1878: Bierstadt had had his day. Even those artists of the older landscape school who were given the nod—Jervis McEntee

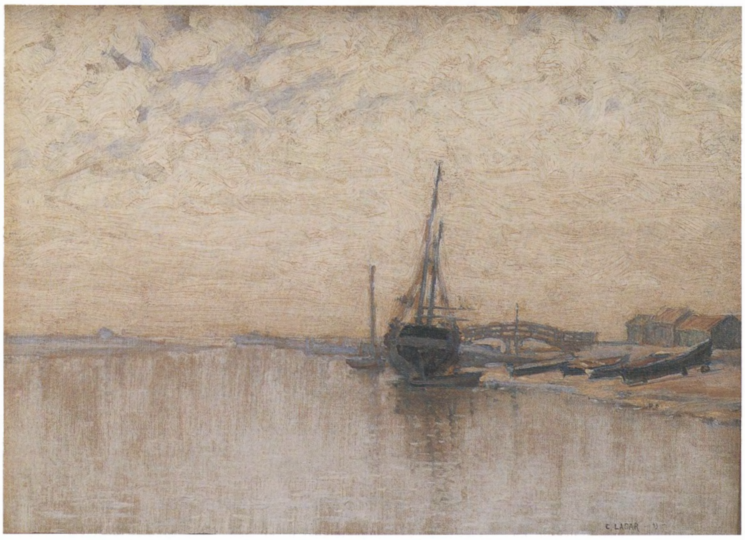


Fig. 6.1. Charles Lasar, *River Scene, France*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

and Thomas Worthington Whittredge (head of the jury for the National Academy) were the most prominent—submitted landscapes of a decidedly Tonalist character, as critic Charles de Kay had praised them for doing in his reviews. This was another indication that the Tonalist movement was exerting pressure on both figurative artists and landscapists of the outdated Hudson River School to adapt to the new trends.

Taking his cue from the democratic policies instituted by the Society of American Artists in 1886, the Commissioner of Fine Arts, Rush Christopher Hawkins (1831–1920), appointed juries of selection that were broadly inclusive of the dominant trends in American art. Twelve jurors were requested from the National Academy, including one representative from Boston and one from Philadelphia, and five from the Society of American Artists, in theory comprising conservative and radical views. Of the twelve academy jurors, five were landscapists: William Hart, Jervis McEntee, Thomas Moran, Worthington Whittredge, and Hugh Bolton Jones, whose painting *The Old Pasture*, circa 1889, (see fig. 4.34) won a bronze medal. Jones was the only member of the younger generation of landscape Tonalists and an early member of the Society of American Artists. Only one of the society jurors was a dedicated Tonalist landscapist—William A. Coffin—although a second juror, J. Alden Weir, was just making the transition to his landscape phase. Significantly, Weir submitted the Tonalist landscape of his Branchville farm, *Lengthening Shadows*, 1887 (see fig. 5.78), lent by its owner William T. Evans, who would go on to amass the largest and finest collection of Tonalist landscapes in America. Weir was awarded a silver medal for *Lengthening Shadows*, which must have further confirmed his inclination to move in the direction of the Tonalist landscape. A Paris contingent of American artists led by expatriates Frederick Bridgman and Alexander Harrison, and a jury made up almost entirely of genre painters, selected work from the European-based artists, which constituted nearly half the American section (a cause of complaint from artists in America that would, in good time, be redressed during the preparations for the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900). It is little wonder that, given the predominance of conservative jurors, the majority of works in the American section were genre works (49 percent), and only 26 percent were landscapes,[2] a reversal of both longstanding historical trends and the mix of figurative and landscape works at the most recent exhibitions of the Society of American Artists.[3] Three-fourths of the Americans had studied in France and so were probably eager to display work geared to impress a French jury, especially genre and figurative works that subscribed to academic ideals. Nevertheless, a stalwart of the expatriate American community, Charles August (Lefty) Lasar (1856–1936), who taught generations of American painters both at the Breton art colonies—where he was famed for his baseball skills—and in Paris, submitted a landscape to the exposition, *On the Coast of Brittany*. *River Scene France*, circa 1890 (fig. 6.1), from the same period, is an example of the soft-edged, low-toned style that Lasar encouraged in his American students, another indication of how firmly the Tonalist style was entrenched in American expatriate circles.

Landscapes may have been in a minority, but they were almost entirely Tonalist in style and represented some of the best and most forward-looking directions in American art, both at home and abroad. Commissioner of Fine Arts General Hawkins made sure that of the older generation Tonalists, both George Inness and Alexander Wyant—who painted *Landscape at Evening*, circa 1880–90, (fig. 6.2, not exhibited in Paris)—were included in the American Section, though the two artists for various reasons had declined to submit works. It is significant that William Merritt Chase, president of the Society of American Artists (he was not included on the Exposition jury, probably because he was still a political liability as a result of the 1884 controversy in which critics had accused him of favoritism in the society's exhibition of that year), chose to submit five small landscapes out of his eight entries in 1889. These landscapes were intimate depictions of American scenes around New York, very different from the artist's earlier Munich genre and portrait work, and had drawn positive reviews when they were exhibited in America. For a foreign audience, Chase's intimate landscapes would have offered an insight into the Aesthetic Tonalism that was absorbing the creative endeavors of many American artists toward the end of the 1880s. Like Weir, Chase had garnered much favorable attention and sales from his quietist landscapes, and placing them on view in Paris offered an international audience striking examples of his distinctively American creations. William A. Coffin (1855–1925), a society juror, exhibited *Early Moonrise*, 1888 (see fig. 8.11), the bronze-medal winner of his four landscapes.

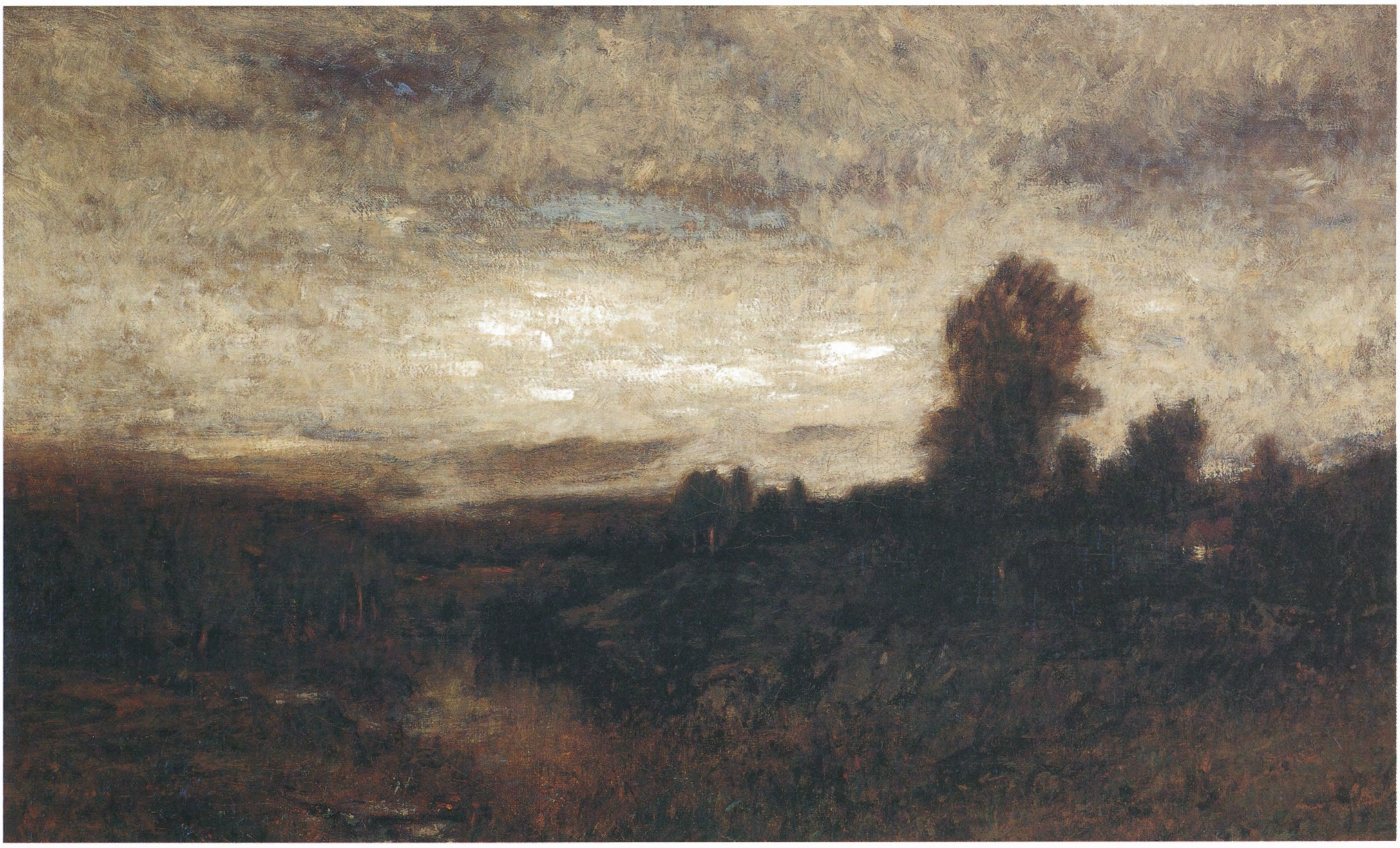


Fig. 6.2. Alexander Wyant, *Landscape at Evening*, c. 1880–90. Oil on canvas, 18 x 30 in. Anonymous collection.

The painting, with its glowing tonalities and orchestrated patterns of landscape forms, offers Coffin's interpretation of the cool, rich simplicity of Aesthetic Tonalism. It is also telling that Kenyon Cox, another member of the society jury and a dedicated figurative artist, chose to show one of his rare Tonalist landscapes, *Flying Shadows*, 1883 (Corcoran Gallery of Art), close in spirit to the innovative landscapes of his friend and colleague J. Alden Weir. Charles Harold Davis, who spent ten years in France working in the summers in the small village of Fleury near Barbizon, had four of his expansive Tonalist landscapes exhibited in 1889. *The Valley, Evening*, 1886 (see fig. 3.51), which won an honorable mention, is a dreamy evocative example of Davis's French landscapes from the early phase of his career before he returned to America. Davis was one of the very few Americans to have developed a distinctive body of Tonalist work in Europe, recording the peculiar atmospheric conditions, the soft, humid twilit summers of the flat plains around Barbizon. Only Alexander Harrison, J. Frank Currier, Charles Fromuth, and Henry Muhrman completed major bodies of work of equal stature outside the United States. Another Tonalist bronze-medal winner, and one of the most famous and sought-after artists of his day, was Robert Minor (1839–1904)—he painted *Near New London*, circa 1900 (fig. 6.3, not exhibited in Paris)—who, of all the Americans, retained a lingering allegiance to Barbizon formulas.

For Alexander Harrison, a mainstay of the American jury in Europe, the 1889 exposition represented a personal triumph. Six of his Tonalist landscapes were shown: three marines and three landscapes that included figurative subjects. Although his *In Arcadia*, 1886 (Musée d'Orsay), featuring naturalistic nudes painted outdoors, was a revelation for the French, and later created something of a scandal when it was exhibited at

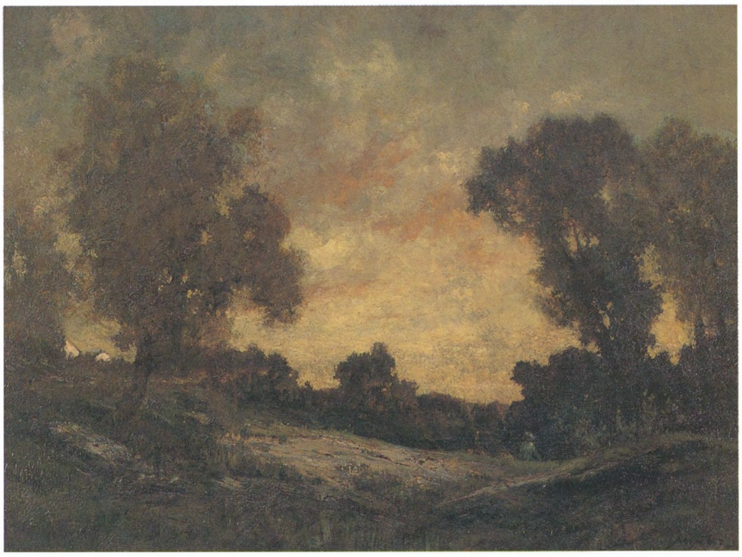


Fig. 6.3. Robert Minor, *Near New London*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

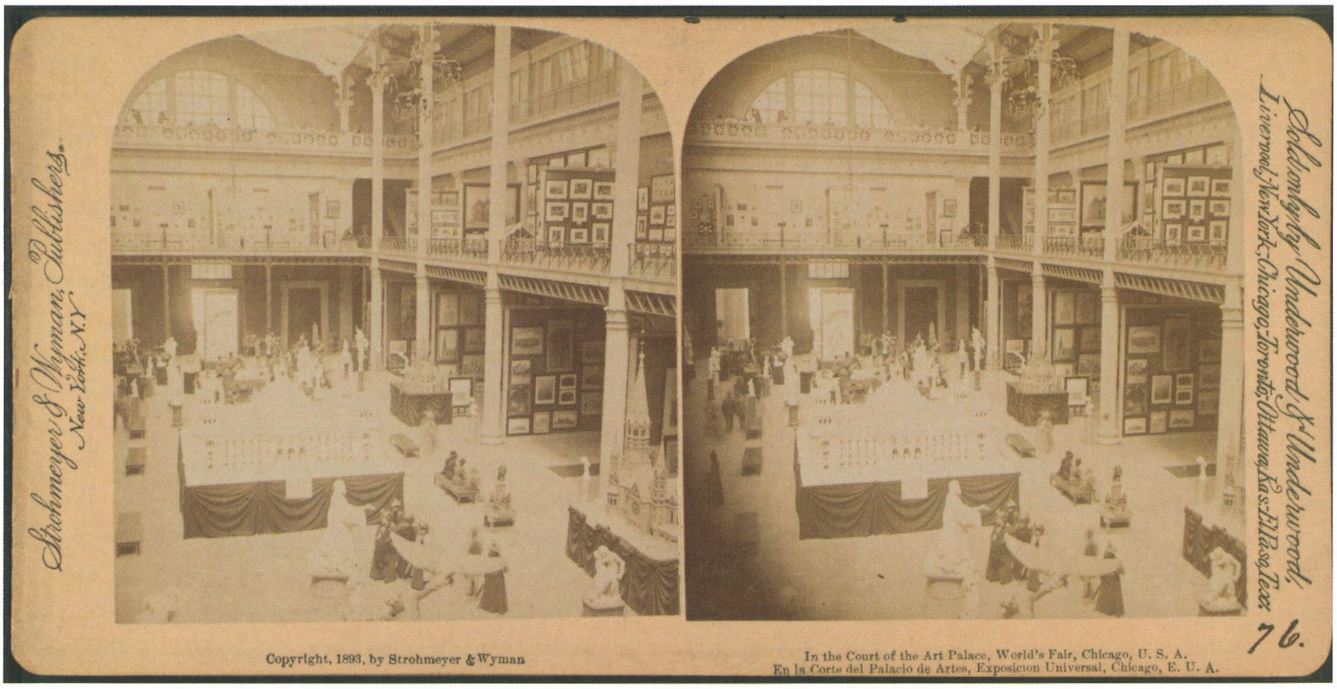
the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *The Wave*, 1885 (see fig. 3.41), and his other marines in twilight and moonlight became Harrison's signature motif and secured the artist's reputation as one of the greatest marine painters of his day. In 1889 Harrison was awarded the Chevalier of the Legion of Honor. *In Arcadia* was bought by the French government, *The Wave* was purchased by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (where it would inspire a generation of Americans), and Harrison would go on to become a fixture of the American art community in Paris, both as teacher and for his Tonalist marines, many heralded as masterpieces in his day. Harrison was a close friend of James McNeill Whistler, especially toward the end of Whistler's life when he was all the rage in Paris; the two old expatriate Americans, exemplars to their many acolytes, often visited together. Alexander Harrison's brother Birge also won a silver medal for *November*, 1881 (see fig. 3.49), which was subsequently bought by the French government. Another ravishing Whistlerian seascape to win a bronze was *Night, St. Ives Bay*, 1889 (see fig. 3.53), by Edward Simmons.

Charles Harry Eaton, a distant relation to Charles Warren Eaton, was represented by *A Normandy Landscape*, 1885 (see fig. 6.51, below), owned by William T. Evans. Harry Eaton was a self-taught painter from Ohio and Michigan who developed a precise and personal Tonalist style that sought to maintain the integrity of form while expressing the soft envelope of atmosphere. *A Normandy Landscape* displays the precision of the self-taught draftsman, in which every shadow and transition of tone is carefully and exquisitely rendered. Although brighter in value than a typical tonal landscape, the lush richness of dreamy color is masterful, as is attested to by its later inclusion in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. Robert Swain Gifford, an early stalwart of the Society of American Artists, exhibited three of his influential landscapes, including *Near the Coast*, circa 1885, showing a lonely windblown tree against the backdrop of a tidal estuary, which became such an iconic image in his oeuvre that he made an etching of the same subject in 1886 (see fig. 5.69). *Near the Coast* was purchased from the Prize Fund Exhibition of the American Art Association in 1885 and presented to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Swain Gifford won a bronze medal from the international jury for his three landscapes in 1889. The one glaring absence in the American Section of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 was Whistler, who, because of misunderstandings with the American exhibition committee (Whistler had taken offense that the American section was unable to hang all twenty-seven etchings he submitted), had forgone inclusion with his countrymen and exhibited in the British section. In the future, Whistler would eschew the British and French sections of the 1900 Exposition Universelle and choose to be exhibited as an American; he was prominently included in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.

The critic Charles de Kay was pleased to report to his *New York Times* readers that out of a total of 250 American exhibitors, 108 won medals of honor, gold, silver, and bronze, as well as honorable mentions. Among the major Tonalists, Alexander Harrison won gold, as did Whistler, although he showed in the British section; J. Alden Weir, Chase, and Dewing won silver medals; and Inness, Swain Gifford, and William Coffin took bronze. As might be expected, there were disgruntled rumblings from the U.S.-based American painters and those who had long returned home from study abroad that their expatriate colleagues won the lion's share of medals. De Kay wrote this off as to be expected since these Americans "live in Paris and work entirely by French technical methods and after French ideas . . . Their work is understood by Frenchmen, who are also flattered by the homage implied by foreign competition. The American colonists also have influence through their former French masters and their wide acquaintanceship in Paris . . . While, therefore, the winners of highest prizes in the painters' camp do not exactly represent the ideals of the United States with respect to the subjects they choose, nor give exactly the measure of American technical methods, they are certainly men to be proud of, since they are able to compete with the best artists of Europe on their own ground. And the number of awards, including, as they do, many artists who have never studied in Europe, is a subject for *legitimate* [italics original] congratulation."[4] De Kay's undertone of pique and damning with faint praise the successful American imitators of French style tells much about the growing bias and demands for an all-American art that was becoming increasingly strident in New York art circles, while the critic's mention of "American technical methods" probably refers to the homegrown Aesthetic Tonalism firmly established by Inness, Chase, Whistler, Charles Warren Eaton, Ryder, Blakelock, and a score of other major Tonalists by 1889. De Kay's undercurrent of exasperation was also prompted by the absence of many of these same Tonalists, like Tryon, Ryder, Blakelock, Charles Warren Eaton, J. Francis Murphy, Ben Foster, and Leonard Ochtman—all of whom would subsequently exhibit in Chicago in 1893. De Kay offered up a rallying cry against the aping of foreign academic formulas: "Such a showing ought to enliven the whole guild in the United States and spur our workmen on towards greater things . . . ."[5]

The Chicago World's Fair, 1893

The selection of American artists for the Fine Arts section of the Chicago World's Fair (fig. 6.4) followed a process for choosing artists similar to that of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889. The fair's chairman, Halsey Cooley Ives, and his assistant Charles Kurtz, both men with extensive experience in the fine arts and connections to the New York art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En la Corte del Palacio de Artes, Exposicion Universal, Chicago, E. U. A.
76.

Fig. 6.4. *In the Court of the Art Palace, World's Fair, Chicago, U.S.A.* Stereoscopic views of the World's Columbian Exposition by Strohmeyer & Wyman, 1893: Robert N. Dennis Collection of Stereoscopic Views, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints & Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

establishment, set about forming advisory committees and juries based in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Paris. The goal of the American exhibition was to show "what has been accomplished by American artists since the [Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876]."[6] Both Ives and Kurtz had strong opinions about who were the best and most progressive artists, and although they managed to broker the interests of various communities and generations of artists through the byzantine politics of a convoluted selection process, many of the final selections represented their personal choices, often influenced by string pulling behind the scenes by the major collectors Thomas B. Clarke and William T. Evans. Inness's *A Gray Lowery Day* (see fig. 2.14) and *Sunny Autumn Day* (see fig. 6.59) were only two of thirteen of the artist's works lent by Clarke, who was Inness's friend, manager, and dealer. Although there was no formal demarcation between the older National Academy of Design and the more radical Society of American Artists (differences between the two bodies were less obvious in 1893 than in 1889), the advisory board members and later juries of selection were mostly made up of early society members like Robert Swain Gifford, William Merritt Chase, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, and Hugh Bolton Jones (all of whom, by 1893, were also members of the academy). Ives and Kurtz were disappointed that they were unsuccessful in luring progressives like John Henry Twachtman and J. Alden Weir onto selection juries. Criticism from the older stalwarts at the National Academy focused on the selection committees, which they claimed were packed with society members, mostly younger men with foreign training, who were not sufficiently "American." Whether this perceived un-American bias was due to subject matter or style or a little of both was questionable at best, and more likely a canard propagated by the old guard. The result Ives and Kurtz wanted was the selection of artists "of acknowledged standing" with "important recent works," which "by bold departure from conventional lines have become representative of American art."[7]

Ives and Kurtz took fire from what Kurtz described as "the rest of that pre-historic crowd," Hudson River painters Bierstadt, James and William M. Hart, and other older members of the National Academy. When only one genre painting by J. G. Brown was initially accepted, Thomas Moran, a painter of scenic views of the West, criticized the jury for accepting exclusively work that embodied modern French notions. Moran blamed William Merritt Chase, accusing him of being behind the rejection of another genre painter, Frederick Remington, because he was not French enough. From Chase's standpoint, "the war [is] not strife between foreign and American ways of painting, but between the good and the bad—and only incidentally between the old and the new."[8] For the national jury, Ives tried to engage Weir, Twachtman, and Dwight Tryon, among others, all of whom turned down the call. Ives and Kurtz were professionally close to collectors William T. Evans, who lent sixteen paintings, and Thomas B. Clarke, who lent forty-nine paintings, including fifteen by Inness. The artists finally exhibited, in terms of numbers of paintings and prominence of position in the hanging, seemed to revolve around relationships to Ives and Kurtz and their representatives on the various juries. Professionalism, reputation, and the emphasis on form and color (the criteria William Morris Hunt had enshrined in his teachings and book, *Talks on Art*) were the operative factors in Kurtz's selection of work. According to art historian Carolyn Kinder Carr, who traced the history of the American art featured at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Charles Kurtz was a firm supporter of the Tonalist movement. "That he did consider form and color in his installation suggests that Kurtz, despite his rather catholic tastes in art, did have a particular strong sympathy for those who worked in a tonal mode. Certainly artists who employed this approach, stressing a personal and evocative interpretation of subject matter and a highly painterly rendering of images, among them William Merritt Chase, Dwight W. Tryon, George Inness, Willard L. Metcalf, J. Francis Murphy, Theodore Robinson, James McNeill Whistler, and Alexander H. Wyant, were not only well represented but also well placed at the exposition."[9]

Critical response to the American section was generally glowing, with the American press, as might be expected, often finding the American artists stronger than their European counterparts. Charles de Kay was well pleased with the exhibition of American works, noting that fears of an overabundance of unworthy American exhibitors never materialized. "It is also true that very little poor stuff originating in America has found a place on these walls. The selecting was too thorough and in too competent hands. Americans have also been liberal in loaning from their private collections the best specimens of native and foreign art."[10] It may well be that behind the scenes de Kay played a significant role in directing the New York jury, commissioners Ives and Kurtz, and major collectors like Clarke and Evans toward the finest Tonalist landscape artists, including Inness, Wyant, Tryon (*The Rising Moon, Autumn*, see fig. 5.95), Coffin, Dewing, and Dewey; all were well represented and in large numbers.

The indiscriminate hanging of the American section, the mixing up of large and small, landscape and figurative or genre works, gave the exhibition a helter-skelter quality that must have troubled purists more used to the carefully balanced hangings of the Society of American Artists. A writer in the *New York Times*, probably de Kay using the pseudonym E.S.C. (the prolific de Kay often used this ploy to hide his identity), in an article headed "Impressions of an Art Student at the World's Fair," gives a lively sense of the impact of the American section vis-à-vis the foreign exhibitors. "Entering at the main door and turning to the left, we come into the United States section, which demands and will repay careful and searching study. The sun breaks gloriously over the flaming color in Whistler's 'Princess of the Land of Porcelain'; Abbott Thayer is here with his 'Brother and Sister,' his 'Virgin Enthroned,' and a portrait; Dewing has half a dozen canvases, marvels of values, and Sargent's aggressive and expressive cleverness flashes at you from the walls."[11] The writer goes through the exhibitions of the other nations, France, Britain, Holland, Austria, and Italy, and returns to "the large and varied exhibit that is given by the United States, the sentiment it inspires is one of hopeful courage and somewhat surprised appreciation... Dewing, John La Farge, Sargent, Thayer, and a few other figure painters, show sober, studious canvases in which the infrangible laws of the great art are observed with fidelity and intelligence—in which the love and knowledge of beauty dominate mere trick of expression and in which individuality, freedom from schools, and cramping traditions may be seen clearly enough.

"In landscape we have no Monet for full sunlight, no Cazin for gray distances, no Turner for castles drenched with rainbow lights, but we have work that takes a high place among these others. Dewey and Inness, Walker and Twachtman show, each in a different way from the others, that study of the planes of earth and depths of air, of tremulous atmosphere and delicate reserves, that respect for Nature which set the pre-Raphaelite landscapists to picturing every leaf upon a bough rendering her mystery in place of stripping it from her. Perhaps of all the landscapists in the United States room Charles Melville Dewey (see *The Return of the Hayboats*, fig. 6.28) shows the most interesting canvases, as indicating a departure as individual and as valuable as that of the Barbizon painters. In these calm and lovely stretches of land and water, in this union of truth and mystery, of exquisite drawing and atmospheric breadth, of tender values and luminous color, is found an effort toward the beauty and poetry of nature that is neither hysterical nor sentimental, crude nor brutal, but quiet, sane, and intense, with the promise of becoming an enduring element in American art."[12]

Whether the writer was de Kay or not, the tenor of the review perfectly encapsulates the prevailing ideals of American art that were writ large at Chicago in 1893, particularly in terms of landscape and Aesthetic Tonalism. Carr, citing a review in *The Critic* by Harriet Monroe, notes the tropes that characterized the broader critical response to the Americans: "depths of air... tremulous atmosphere... truth and mystery... atmospheric breadth, of tender values and luminous color... quiet, sane, and intense." Above all was an independence from European influence—an issue that rankled the indigenous American artists since the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889. Landscape in particular was singled out as America's special contribution, esteemed for its poetry, sincerity, individuality, "freshness in atmosphere," originality and vitality.[13] Critics like de Kay were pleasantly surprised how well the Americans stood up against the French, explaining away the disappointing impact of the French exhibition as a result of its lack of "astonishers" or big crowd pleasers, which regularly appeared at the annual Paris Salons.[14] French standards of artistry in execution were the qualitative criteria for critics, but when applied to clichéd scenes of Brittany peasants and picturesque Dutch windmills by American artists, the critics were quick to condemn such effusions as merely imitation, no matter how well they were painted. Inness with fifteen paintings, Tryon with fourteen, and Wyant with ten saw their huge reputations enhanced, while Homer with fifteen entries and Whistler with six—the largest group of major works yet shown in America—were confirmed as all-American exemplars of the finest artists in the nation. Homer was a distinctive original, a realist who caught the character of his New England fishermen and the "homely poetry" of their labors. Wyant, who had died the previous year in 1892, exhibited ten ethereal woodland landscapes and was well on the way to exalted rank in American collecting circles. Homer Dodge Martin, represented by four landscapes lent by various collectors, was near-blind and enfeebled; he would die in 1897. George Inness, who would die the following year in 1894, was approaching the heights of fame that would be fully his by 1900. The word "genius" was repeatedly applied to Inness and his work was considered authentic and having transcended his earlier association with the Hudson River School. Carr, citing a critic in the *New York Daily Tribune*, notes that Inness was considered truly American: "Inness knew 'the secrets of our storms and sunsets.' While his 'beginnings were sown amid the now antiquated tenets of the Hudson River school,' his art was seen as 'released from [these] analytic shackles' and rivaling 'the great landscape work of France on its own ground.'"[15]

Of the expatriates, Whistler came in for the most glowing praise and appreciation, followed closely by John Singer Sargent and Alexander Harrison. Whistler was often referred to as a genius and his sublime and mysterious harmonies extolled, though many critics worried that his sketchy unfinished style would be misunderstood by those not tutored in the new language of art. His ties to the art of Velásquez were duly noted but it was his personal approach, his individuality, that was signaled out, as Charles de Kay had noted Ryder and Blakelock a decade earlier. Although Whistler's portraits garnered the majority of discussion (four portraits and two landscapes were exhibited), his *Nocturne: Blue and Gold—Valparaiso*, 1866 (see fig. 3.61), which would end up in Charles Freer's collection, stirred some of the most glowing observations by critics who were most attuned to the flourishing Tonalist mode in American art. A critic wrote in *Art Amateur* about Whistler, "His special gift of playing with a single tone, as a great violinist may draw music from a single string, is just what is needed by a painter of 'nocturnes.' Whistler varies his tint by the mere play of the brush; by the less or more pigment that he puts on the canvas; by the nearer or more remote juxtaposition of two nearly similar tones. We believe he might, if he wished, paint a whole picture out of the one pot of pigment, and it yet would not appear to be monochrome."[16]

The embrace of Whistler as an American original in the heart of his homeland in 1893 represents a culmination of enthusiasm for his art in America going back a decade or more, the kind of recognition that would only begin to peak in London and Paris by 1900. Although Whistler might lack the "soul" so esteemed by Americans in the work of Inness, Martin, and Wyant, that special tenor of true sentiment growing out of the soil of the American landscape, the artist's spiritual qualities and rare sensibilities touched on the universal uncertainties of the age. Whistler became a beacon for his compatriots, especially for collectors like Freer who would glean his scattered work from collections throughout England and France in the 1890s and the following decades, finally enshrining his collection in the nation's capital. Among the American figurative artists, Sargent, the master of bravura paint handling, was highly regarded, though his work was antithetical to Whistler's. Both artists were claimed as national treasures by critics. Alexander Harrison, too, received praise for the poetry and refined depiction of atmospheric light in his marines and landscapes.

The crucial difference between the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 and the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 was the inclusion at Chicago of the younger generation of Tonalists in large numbers—often with four or five paintings each. Among the most significant names, and works typical of this period (though these were not exhibited), were John Twachtman (*Paradise Rocks, Newport*, c. 1889, fig. 6.5), Charles Warren Eaton (*Near Thompson Connecticut*, c. 1895, see p. 16), Bruce Crane (*Winter Mood*, c. 1895, fig. 6.6), J. Francis Muphy (*The Meadow Farm*, c. 1890, fig. 6.7), Charles Harry Eaton (*Boating on a Waterway*, c. 1880s, fig. 6.8), Ben Foster (*Black Squall*, c. 1900, fig. 6.9), and William L. Picknell, *La Lande de Kerran*, 1878, fig. 6.10). The expatriate Henry Muhrman, who lived in London and moved in Whistler's artistic circles, won a medal for his pastels *Hampstead Heath*, 1891, and *View of Highgate*, 1892 (see figs. 3.15 and 3.16).

With the introduction of the generation of 1840–65, the Chicago World's Fair marked the coming of age of American art. De Kay wrote glowingly of the moment, noting the most tangible reflection of success in terms of the medal count for the Americans—a thoroughly democratic process in his reckoning, since degrees of merit—a practice common in France at the Salons and Expositions Universelles were eliminated. "There is not odious discrimination marked by gold, silver, and bronze; by first, second, or third medal ... More medals have been allotted to painters and sculptors who live at home than to those who inhabit the various colonies in Germany, France, and Italy. This is welcome, as tending to show that Americans are regarding fine art less as an exotic belonging to other climes, and learning to value it more as an expression of national ideas

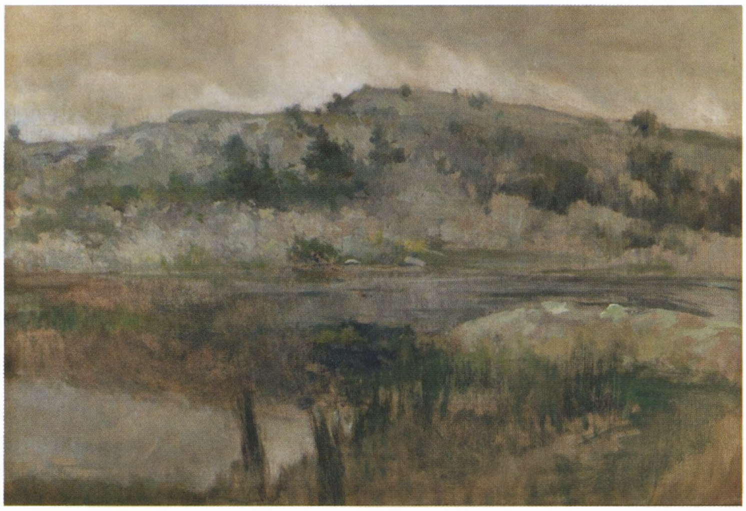


Fig. 6.5. John Henry Twachtman, *Paradise Rocks, Newport*, c. 1889. Oil on canvas, 31½ x 47 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

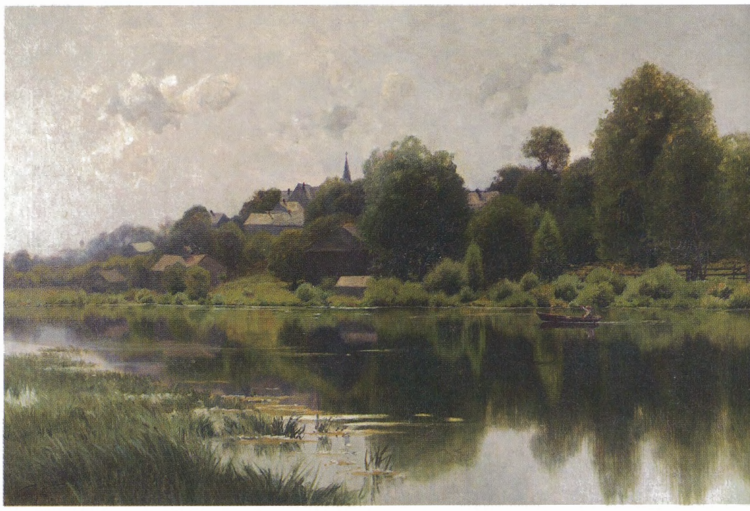


Fig. 6.8. Charles Harry Eaton, *Boating on a Waterway*, c. 1880s. Oil on canvas, 27 x 43 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

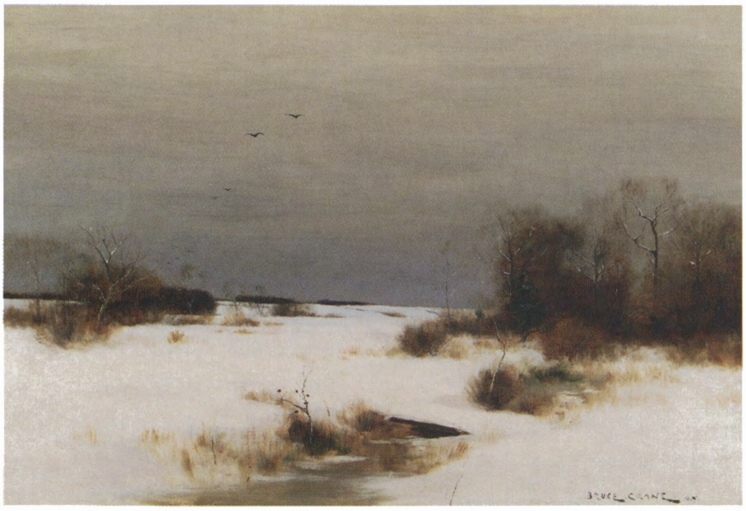


Fig. 6.6. Bruce Crane, *Winter Mood*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas mounted to board, 16⅛ x 24 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

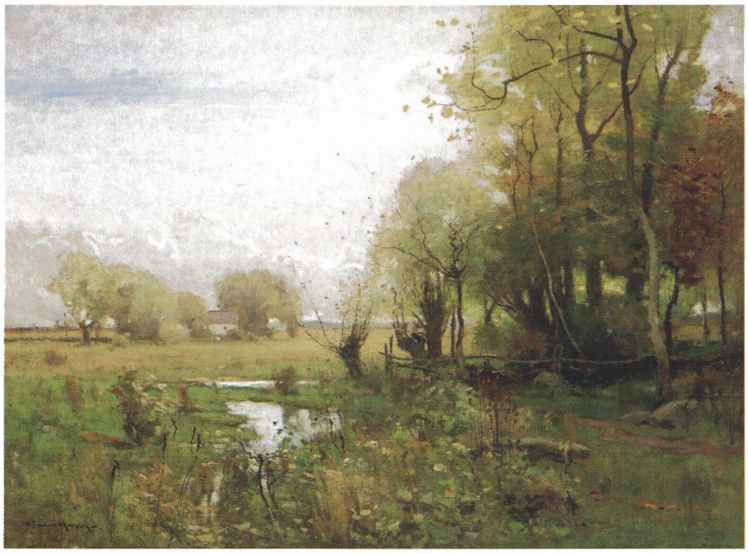


Fig. 6.7. J. Francis Murphy, *The Meadow Farm*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 24¾ x 33¾ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

and American character, whether local or individual character." De Kay also proudly noted the large percentage of women who won medals and how New York artists dominated the medal race. Naturally, however, as had been the case in Paris in 1889, the medal results produced rancor, and charges of bad faith flew fast and furious. This time it was the expatriate Americans' turn to claim that they had been slighted by the American-based artists in Chicago; many withdrew their names from competition, ostensibly because the medal awards did not indicate degrees of distinction. De Kay dismissed the expatriate claim of being snubbed, pointing out that the juries were international in character and not dominated by American judges. "If there was an award of more medals to home artists than to those who live in Europe, the reason must be sought elsewhere than in a theory of revenge . . . in fact the permanent settlers in Europe have been very fully remembered, and their number is swollen by those who have returned so recently to America that they are still painting like Europeans . . . ." De Kay brilliantly turned the tables on the medal critics to drive home the point he really wanted to make—hoisting those, whose amour propre had suffered, by their own petard. "What is very possible, however, is this: The foreigners themselves may have valued more those works by Americans which contain a minimum of echoes from European masters; they may have enjoyed more the touch of individuality and the original element in our home artists than the facile copying by Paris colonists of French painters and sculptors of note. But if this be so, and the Europeans on the jury preferred the home products, who can blame them? Certainly not the connoisseurs [Thomas B. Clarke, William T. Evans, and Charles Freer] on this side of the Atlantic, who are every year realizing more keenly that the men who live in America are those who produce that American art which reflects the Nation, and which will be likely to live under the stress of changing fashions, because it springs from original

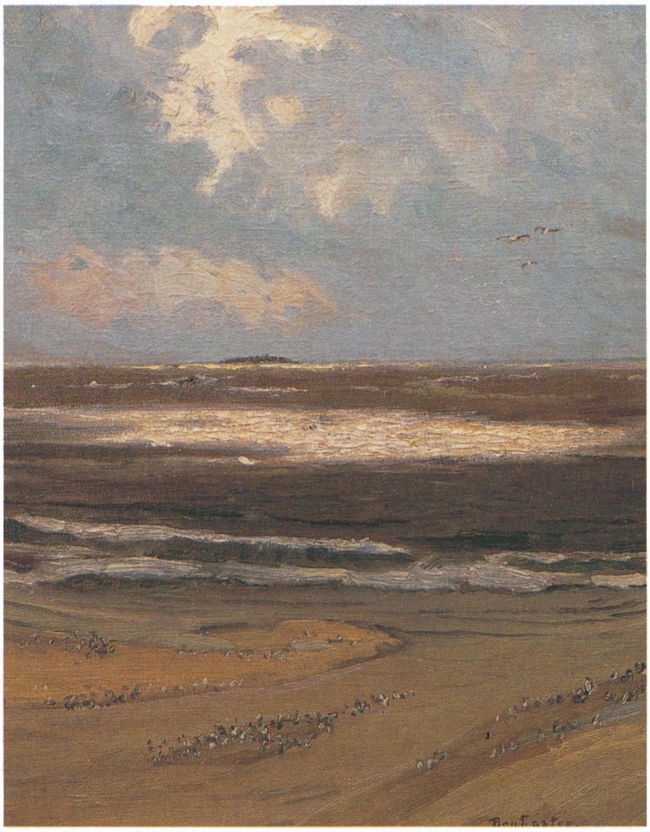


Fig. 6.9. Ben Foster, *Black Squall*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 15 x 12 in. Private collection.

observation of facts, and is not merely clever workmanship embroidering upon themes taken at second hand."[17]

Here, in this candid outburst, is de Kay's declaration of independence—and that of his circle of art world insiders—a battle cry for "individuality and the original element" in American art, free of foreign influence. Neither French Impressionism nor French academicism would fill the bill: Tonalism, and perhaps more particularly, Whistlerian Aesthetic Tonalism exemplified in the work of the younger artists, was the distinctly and peculiarly American style par excellence. The Chicago World's Fair thus marks not just the coming of age of an innovative American art but also a critical mass of support from all sectors of the art world. The Gilder circle promoted Tonalism as a radical answer to the Europhiles. A growing band of monied collectors began assembling these artworks, while at the same time a new breed of dealer began to gravitate to the homegrown product, further promoting the collecting of American art as a smart and patriotic investment. This increasing nationalist sentiment was underscored by the Gilder-circle flagship publication, *The Century Magazine*, in an article by the astute and prolific art critic John C. Van Dyke, on the paintings exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair. (Van Dyke's seminal volume, *Art for Art's Sake*, was published in 1893—with eighteen editions by 1914.) Van Dyke portrayed Chicago as a watershed in American art, noting that fifteen years before, "America had little painting to boast of; certain it is that to-day we have a painting full of much skill, energy, and sentiment, with considerable originality." The Paris- and Munich-trained young Americans have brought home much new expertise, wrote Van Dyke, but at a cost. "Thus we are at the start influenced by foreign elements. The influence is our gain in craftsmanship, but it is to our loss in originality. Parisian ideas and notions of art may be better than our own, and, if we repeat them, we are playing the parrot, imitating, and not creating. American painters are not disposed to be servile followers." After illustrating the many pitfalls of foreign influence, Van Dyke directs his readers to the sources of unique strength in American art. "With less technical skill than some of our younger men [something de Kay would certainly agree with], Winslow Homer stands by himself, a painter of strength whose works command attention everywhere, largely because they are American without preface or apology. They breathe of the soil and the sea, tell of their place of origin, give the American point of view. Just so with the landscapes of Mr. Inness. They are peculiarly our own in every respect, and would be recognized as such in any country. Many of the older painters, contemporaries of Mr. Inness, such as Mr. Martin, the late Mr. Wyant, and others, men who have not been turned aside by foreign ideas, make up to-day our strongest landscape art. They know what they wish to paint, and they paint it.

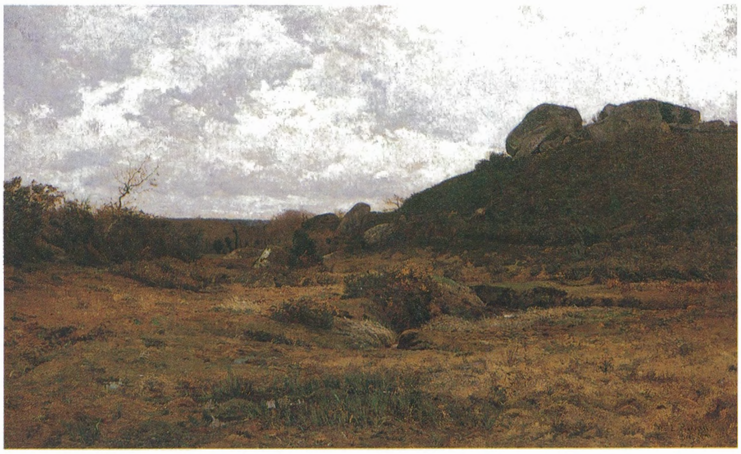


Fig. 6.10. William Lamb Picknell, *La Lande de Kerran*, 1878. Oil on canvas, 35½ x 59¼ in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

"We are nearer to having an American school of art in landscape than elsewhere. There is a decisive note even from the younger men. Mr. Platt [who painted *Afternoon Clouds*, circa 1887, not exhibited; fig. 6.11], Mr. Tryon, Mr. Twachtman, have an individual way of stating their ideas, and some of the painters given to schemes of high light and color are branching out in new and unexpected ways. In fact, there is much hope to be placed in the large band of young landscape painters at present working in this country. They have skill, and as they grow older they will gain the conviction that our pictorial view is the only one for them. It might be added, without national

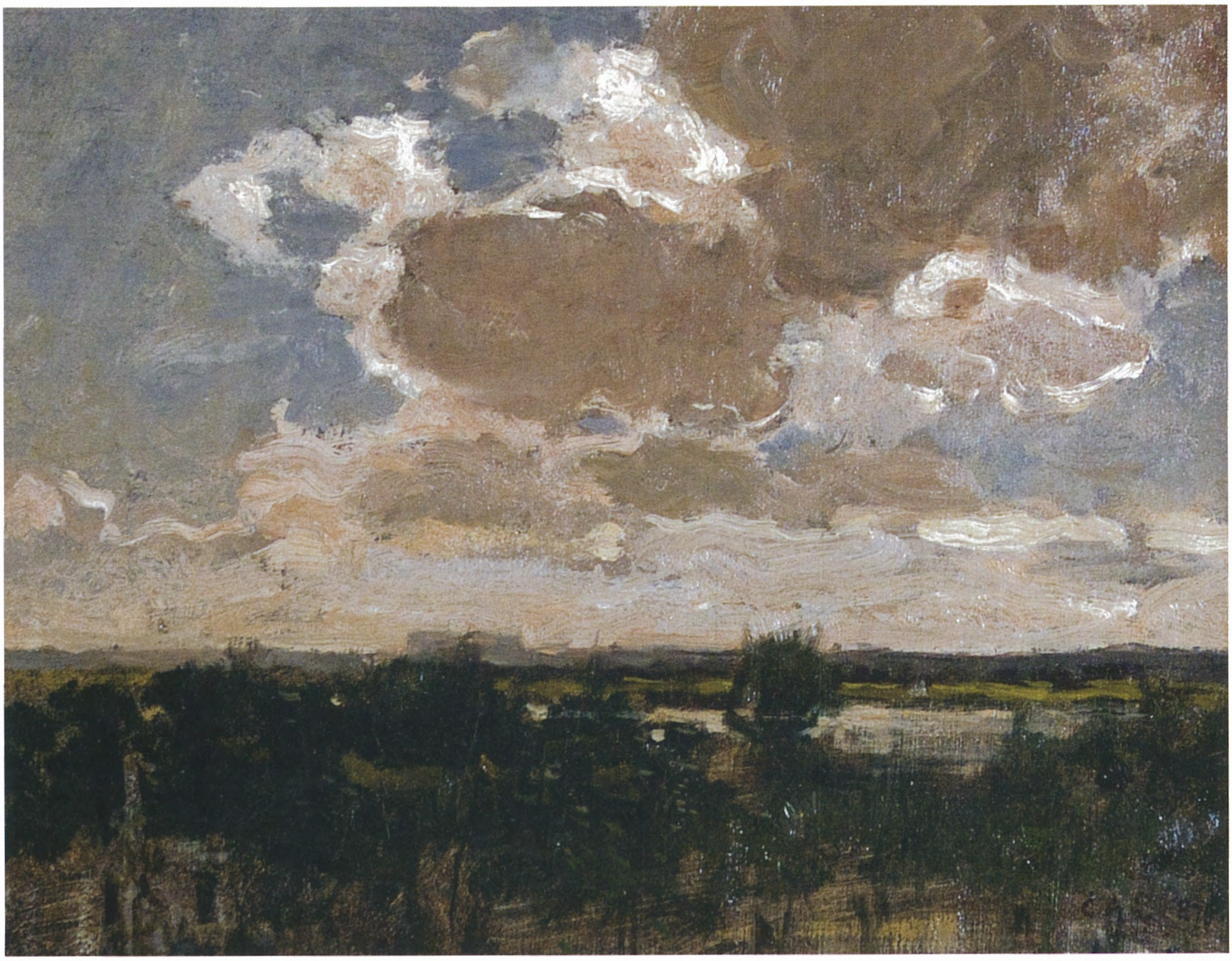


Fig. 6.11. Charles A. Platt, *Afternoon Clouds*, c. 1887. Oil on canvas, 12 x 15 in. Courtesy Brock & Co.

pride, that as regards landscape, it is the best one now extant in the schools, and that it has little or nothing to gain from the view of others."[18]

Van Dyke's championing of the Tonalist landscape, especially examples by the younger artists, representative of a "peculiar point of view ... of a time, a clime, and a people," an art stressing individuality, "refined color ... largeness of conception ... delicacy of sentiment," precisely reinforced de Kay's gospel of American exceptionalism—a sometimes strident voice that would only grow stronger in the coming decades. In the difficult economic times ahead, beginning with the panic of 1893 and extending to the end of the century, media supporters and the collectors and dealers so strongly in evidence at Chicago would provide both the critical backup and financial succor for many of America's finest artists.

As a result of a variety of relationships and convictions, some of genuine enthusiasm and others involving commercial dealing, the fair's art administrators, Ives and Kurtz, were deeply involved in, if not dependent on, the emerging powers in the New York art world. More important, the Chicago World's Fair brought to the public's attention the finest of the rising stars who would dominate American art for two decades and more: the best of the younger Tonalist landscapists (born between 1840 and 1865), including expatriates and members of the first generation, soon to fade from the scene. The sheer number, as well as the quality, of the landscape selections attest to the dominance of the Tonalist landscape in the highest reaches of the American art establishment (with the only glaring omission being Albert Pinkham Ryder): Ralph Albert Blakelock, two; William Coffin, six; Charles Harold Davis, six; Charles Melville Dewey, four; Thomas Dewing, seven; Charles Harry Eaton, two; Charles Warren Eaton, four; William Lamb Picknell, four; Ben Foster, four; Robert Swain Gifford, eleven; Alexander Harrison, six; Birge Harrison, two; Winslow Homer, fifteen (four tonal landscapes and marines); George Inness, fifteen; Hugh Bolton Jones, two; Homer Dodge Martin, four; Robert Minor, three; J. Francis Murphy, three; Leonard Ochtman, three; Walter Launt Palmer, three; Alexander Schilling, two; William Sartain, two; John Henry Twachtman, five; J. Alden Weir, three landscapes, including *The Lane*, circa 1890 (see fig. 5.55); Alexander Wyant, ten; Bruce Crane, one; Henry Golden Dearth, one; and Arthur Wesley Dow, one.

The Death of George Inness and the Creation of an Iconic Figure of the Tonalist Movement

The sudden death of George Inness in Scotland in the summer of 1894 was both a shock to the American art world and a confirmation that the fifteen Inness works on display in Chicago represented a sea change in American art. The nation had lost its greatest landscape painter—its greatest artist—and this after the death of Alexander Wyant only two years before in 1892, while an ailing Homer Dodge Martin was living in seclusion and near poverty (he would die of cancer three year sslater). By 1900, Inness, Wyant, and Martin were revered as the founding triumvirate of the Tonalist school of landscape painting. Inness's death, and the extraordinary encomiums that came the artist's way, sealed his greatness and touched his many acolytes with the fire of his memory. Inness had set the mold for their determination to pursue a new landscape school of feeling, mystery, and transcendent truth. In the midst of a terrible depression and the heat of August, the National Academy of Design gave Inness a memorial service and a lying-in-state fit for a prince of the realm. Charles de Kay, reporting at great length on the memorial service wrote of Inness with near rapture, describing the "strength and implacable serenity," of his face, and "the eyes of which were profound and mystic, while the forehead, pure as the entablature of a Greek temple, was radiant with interior light.

"Yet he had known the envy of rivals, the hatred of fools, cold indifference, the sufferings of those he loved atrociously mingled with fever of creative fervor, and all the misfortunes, accidents, ridiculous annoyances and crimes of fate allied in perpetual vexation against the genius of man.

"In the artistic circle of which his mortal envelope was the centre yesterday, Inness's long baptism of labor and pain could not be realized. There were impulsive thoughts only of the morning landscapes, tender, vaporous, ideal, where leaves imperceptibly tremble in a soft, undecided light, and enchanting visions in the foliage furtively glance at dark fountains faintly whitening; of evening landscapes, inflamed from skies where wall and citadels crumble into melting gold; of heights that seraphita climbed, and of all the rhapsodies of epic poems which Inness impressed for Americans in accurate records of their country's widely magnificent natural scenery....

"He was the very reverse of an imitator, and his long years of suffering in the most hideous of mundane circles, the one where great works are received in mute unconcern, were his penalty for being one of the world's greatest artists ... He has obtained glory more solid, more durable, and more universal than many great men of his time ... He asked of color to express the soul, the thought, the mysterious attitude of the intimate being which is in nature, and he succeeded by force of passionate endeavor."

De Kay wrote of the Swedenborgian minister who presided at the memorial service: "There was an artistic inclination in his well-made phrases when he spoke of Inness's conception of nature as all symbolical, and of his art to reproduce this, not in the crude forms of outward expression that the common mind may easily grasp, but in spiritual suggestions ... The sentiment sent a thrill of appreciation in the audience of artists that nothing more sensually expressive might have produced ... There was not an unimpressioned person among the painters, poets, and sculptors there, to whom art itself is a religion intolerant and jealous."

De Kay transcribed the words of Inness's Swedenborgian pastor, the reverend Dr. Alger, who knew Inness well. "Those of you who knew George Inness know how intense a man he was ... He was an intense man. He was a genuine man ... He was a true genius ... His opinions, beliefs, convictions, were everything to him ... This intuitive perception of truth is the characteristic of genius ... To him all nature was symbolic—full of spiritual meaning. He prized nothing in nature that did not stand for something ... That was the secret of his theory of art. He cared for no picture that did not tell a story; not necessarily to common minds by this kind of symbolism, but telling a story to the feelings which it suggested, and to the thought to which it gave expression." It is a wonder to the contemporary mind that such sentiments and insights from a religious man on the nature of symbolism in art were not only understood by his listeners but fully embraced. But de Kay observed that for those in attendance, "art itself is a religion intolerant and jealous." As chapter 7 will demonstrate, religion, spirituality, and philosophy were inextricably linked to the creative tensions that produced the Tonalist landscape.

De Kay noted that among the many mourners were the artists John La Farge, Frederick W. Kost, Leonard Ochtman, William A. Coffin, Bruce Crane, as well as Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century Magazine* (a mainstay of Inness's support network for almost twenty years), and Inness's collector and dealer Thomas B. Clarke. Wrote de Kay of Inness's exhausted wife, who was unable to attend the ceremony after bringing her husband's body back from Scotland: "She was prostrated by her husband's death. They had been lovers into old age, and were inseparable companions."[19]

An Inness retrospective in December 1894 featuring 240 canvases further confirmed the artist's prodigious reputation. In his *New York Times* review de Kay noted in his description of Inness's style the singular use of modulated tones at the heart of the artist's inspiration: "There are wondrous tones of green that continually delight and surprise the spectator, though they are never quite the same, from the darkest, vivid minglings of blue and yellow to delicate, dreamy grays, each in its way full of charm and faithful to nature; but they are tones consequent upon fleeting effects, seen rarely, and difficult to

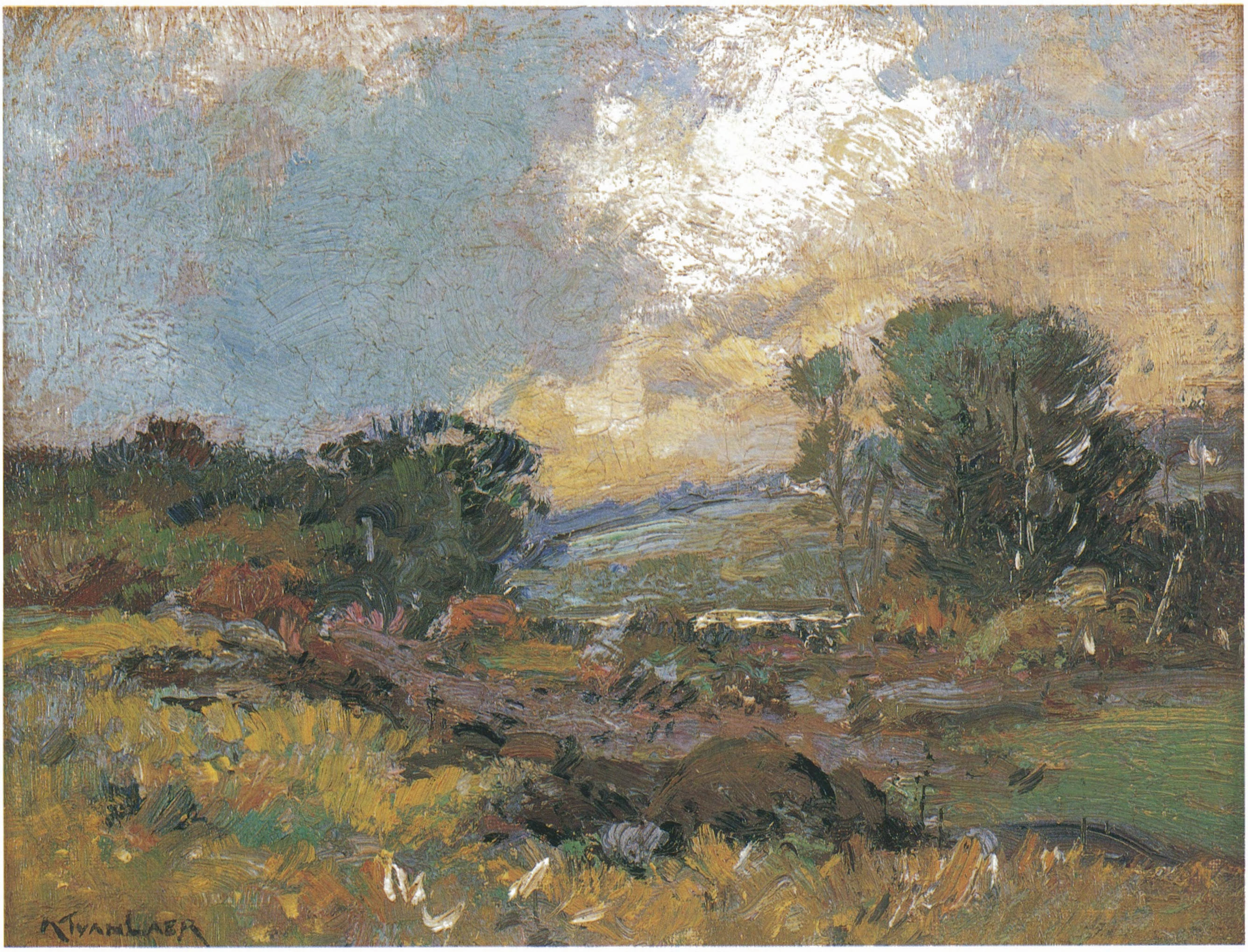


Fig. 6.12. Alexander Van Laer, *The Meadow*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 8 x 11 in. Private collection.

remember—vague, shadowy recollections, like some half-forgotten strain of music."[20] In turn, de Kay's terminology, the use of tone as descriptive of Inness's style and that of the artist's followers, would be taken up by the Lotos Club and further embedded in the popular mind as *the* distinctive feature of American painting.

The Lotos Club Exhibitions

Before turning to the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, where the full flower of American Tonalism would be displayed in an international arena, it is worth reviewing the developments on the New York art exhibition scene in the late 1890s, when the likes of Thomas B. Clarke and collector and art entrepreneur William T. Evans were assembling their vast collections and promoting Tonalist artists through their clubs and by the funding of art prizes at major exhibitions. Evans, in particular, was a masterful promoter, using the Lotos Club to market his favorites. In the 1890s various private clubs in New York, including the Century, Lotos, Salmagundi, and Union League, held small exhibitions of works by members or artists in the collections of members. The Salmagundi Club held annual exhibitions of artist-members' work and so-called thumb-box exhibitions of smaller works, such as Alexander Van Laer's *The Meadow*, 1910 (fig. 6.12), which provided artists with opportunities to expose and sell their work. But it was the Lotos Club under Evans that came to dominate the club exhibition scene in the late 1890s with carefully conceived and publicized shows that promoted Tonalist landscapes in particular, and thus did much to frame and deepen understanding of Tonalism as a distinct style in the public mind. Evans joined the Lotos Club in 1892 and, aided and abetted by the important Tonalist artist Henry Ward Ranger, took over the club's art committee, which he dominated for almost twenty years. Along with other collectors and members of the Lotos Club, he held a series of early exhibitions in the mid-1890s by artists—many, if not most, from his own collection of contemporary artists—that set the stage for his Tonalist-oriented exhibitions later in the decade. The terms "tonal" and "Tonalist" became used more and more frequently in publicity material distributed by the Lotos Club, and subsequent reviews noted the particular Tonalist character of the exhibitions—until a Tonalist picture and a Lotos Club picture were nearly synonymous in the minds of art-world insiders.

Initially, American and French, English, and Dutch paintings were exhibited together to demonstrate the Tonalist inheritance of the Americans and stylistic affinities of the various schools. But as time went on the goal became less to portray the similarities and more to demonstrate the distinctive quality of the American product, if not its intrinsic superiority, much along the lines of Charles de Kay's case for American paintings at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Critics began responding to the thoughtful juxtaposition of works in the hangings, admiring the harmonious effect created by the careful attention devoted to hangings of paintings of similar tonality, recalling the methods the Society of American Artists had established years before. Such "artistic" hangings were noted by a *New York Sun* critic in 1896: "As a showing of tonal pictures it is beautiful, the various paintings holding together in a manner altogether delightful. Not everything in the collection is of equal merit, but it is on the whole a homogeneous exhibition of paintings in which tone is the feature and the raison d'etre."[21]

A sense of what a Lotos Club exhibition under Evans's sponsorship looked and—perhaps more important—felt like can be glimpsed in a *New York Times* review of 1896 (probably by de Kay): "A most creditable display of landscape . . . of low-toned, sober bits of nature, most of them successful in the realization of sentiment, color, and general harmony of key." George Inness's *Home of the Heron*, 1891 (fig. 6.13), was given the place of honor in the hanging, " . . . powerful in its simplicity, rich in tone, and agreeable in its arrangement of line and mass. None of the men here give evidence of sympathy with the present movement of brilliancy of vibrant sunlight, the impressionistic tendencies of pure color effects in high key, or the Monet-like qualities of sparkling pigment, laid on with the full strength of the palette. On the contrary, the men have kept to more quiet efforts in the matter of tone . . . Bruce Crane has an 'Evening After Rain,' successful in rich tones . . . ."[22]

A year later, in 1897, the terminology of the Tonalist movement was in such common circulation that the *Times* reviewer (again, probably de Kay) in a discussion of a Lotos Club display of tonal painting, "ancient and modern," took it upon himself to define the nature of this burgeoning school of American art. "The term tonality is used so glibly by many writers and lecturers on art topics that it as to be feared the general art public is not always entirely certain of its meaning . . . tone in the simplest sense means that harmonious adjustment and blending of values and color which gives sentiment, richness, and artistic value to a picture. There are tonal figure works, as well as landscapes, and to say that a picture lacks tone is to say that it is hard in color, unpleasant in effect, and devoid, as a rule, of true artistic quality."[23] The reviewer sketches out the pedigree of Tonalism from Constable and Velásquez to the old Dutch and Flemish schools, to the modern Dutch painters Mauve and Maris, and the modern American masters Inness, Martin, Tryon, and Ryder "who have been, and are, such students and interpreters of tone in painting, as to make them Tonalists par excellence. . . ."[24]

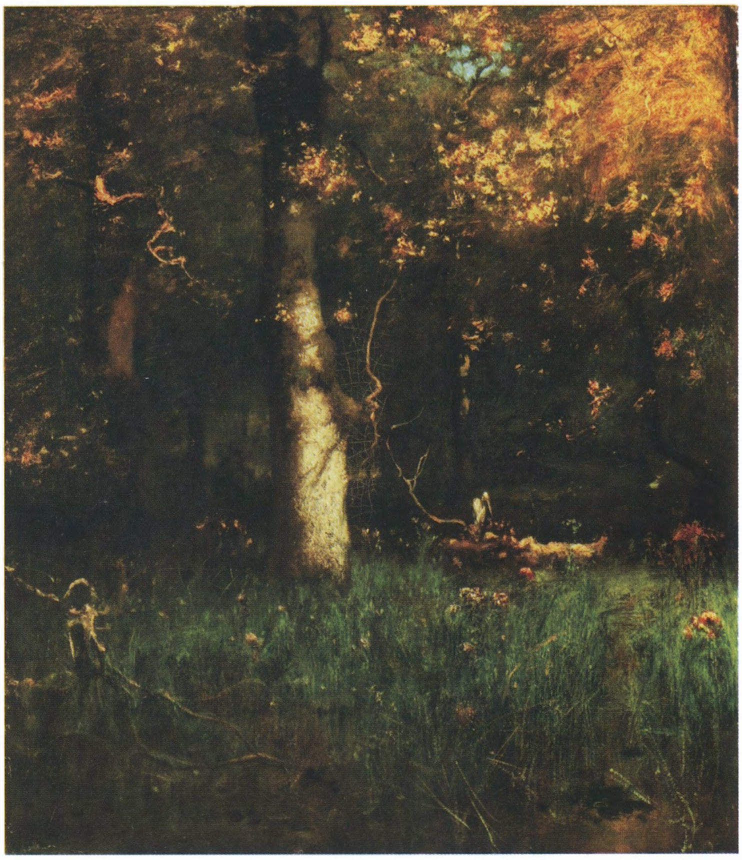


Fig. 6.13. George Inness, *Home of the Heron,* 1891. Oil on canvas, 42 x 37 in. Princeton University Art Museum. Gift of Victor Stephen Harris, Class of 1940, and David Harris, Class of 1944, in memory of their father, Victor Harris. 1943-93.

Written six years later, in 1903, a *New York Times* review, almost certainly by Charles de Kay (after his return from Berlin as American consul in 1897, de Kay continued to write for the *New York Times* in numerous capacities) of the Alexander C. Humphreys collection at the Lotos Club—a gemlike array of works by Alexander Wyant (similar to *Spring*, c. 1885–90, fig. 6.14, not exhibited), Martin, Inness, and their followers—offers a clue to how deeply entrenched the Tonalist aesthetic had become in these years. "They show that their owner values the landscapists who select from nature the tender and intimate qualities of color, the subtler manifestations of light in Autumn and near sunset, and let the more common place pass. For artists cannot place the whole picture of a given landscape before one, and would not if they could. Theirs like everything human, is a process of selection, and the painter who tries to parallel the colored photographs is a Philistine who will have Philistines only for patrons. The pictures . . . very even in excellence, seeming to reflect a distinct taste for the

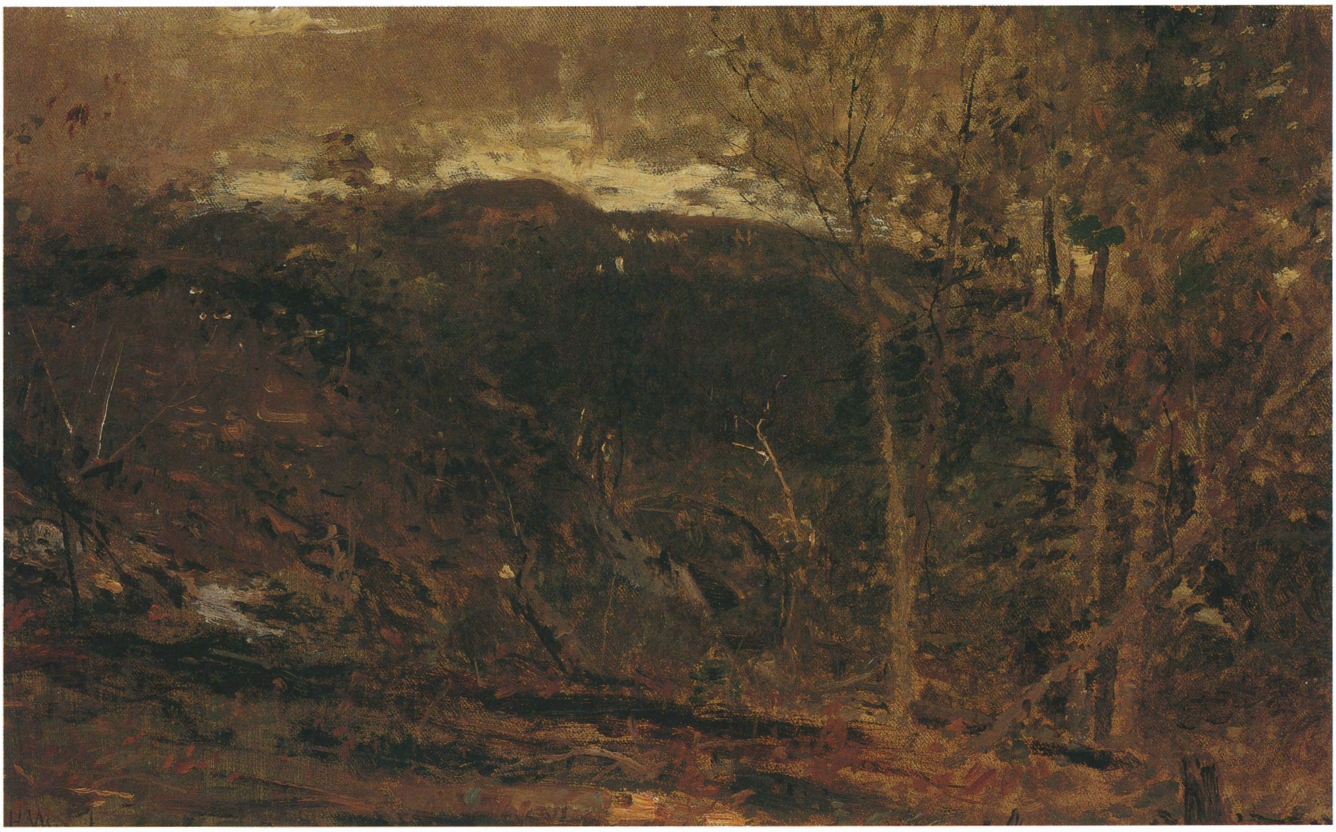


Fig. 6.14. Alexander Wyant, *Spring*, c. 1885–92. Oil on canvas, 10½ x 7 in. Anonymous collection.

landscape in its rich, quiet phase at nightfall and by moonlight, with occasional examples of brighter day dreams to lighten the general tone of somberness that prevails. Here are no paintings by the devotees of dissolved sunlight and vibratory color effects in the strong shining day."[25] The review is significant, too, as a social indicator of Tonalism's new status as an all-American art form—unlike French-derived Impressionism, an art that expressed a refinement of taste and Olympian remove—perhaps most tellingly, and with new elitist cachet, implied in de Kay's allusion to Herbert Spencer's idea of the survival of the fittest. As will be seen in chapter 7, de Kay was enraptured by his Darwinian view of nature and art.

By 1900 and beyond, Evans's tastes in contemporary art and his penchant for Tonalist landscapes in particular were well established and recognized throughout the art world. In 1897, Charles de Kay joined Evans to form the National Arts Club to promote American art. In effect, the top spokesman of the Gilder circle publicity machine for a distinctive American art, de Kay—long an admirer and a booster of Evans the Tonalist collector in print—was teaming up with the collector, along with his Lotos Club minions, to spread the Tonalist gospel near and far. In a long 1898 article in the *New York Times* on Evans and a private viewing of his collection, de Kay alternately praised Evans's taste for "beauty of tones . . . the point of view is delicate tone," and lectured his audience on connoisseurship, touting Evans as the paragon of collecting excellence and virtue. De Kay approved of Evans for dispensing with European artists in favor of the homegrown variety. "American figure and landscape painters of the present day are now the only artists represented on his walls." De Kay delicately passed over the figurative work, mostly that of Frederick Stewart Church, which he clearly could not abide, to tout the American tonal landscapes, "the realm of the colorists." In the course of the article, de Kay reveals that nearly half of Evans's collection had been lent to the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. After highly praising the many landscapes of Martin, Wyant, Ryder, Dewey, Murphy, and Ranger, de Kay, in a lecturing mode, explains that the "subtle tone sonnets and lovely color reveries of the landscapists . . . " are the true balm for the "hard-pressed, weary business man." He compares genre painting and narrative art with popular music and suggests to the connoisseur that it begins to pale upon repeated hearing. The busy man, he says, "wants that kind of music which is not so obvious and catchy, that sets his imagination off wool gathering and fancy weaving, and seems to meet each new mood in his own mind with some new and wonderful possibility or dream. These pictures [the Tonalist landscapes] are nearer to grand nature itself. Although each may render and repeat only an infinitely small portion of nature, still, that bit is enough to entrance us and set the wheels of imagination on the turn." Extolling Evans's collection of Ryders (de Kay had been promoting and collecting Ryder for more than twenty years), de Kay speaks of "a dreaming over them. What do they mean? Nothing—and everything!—according to the observer and his mood." This view of the interaction of art and the imagination was key to de Kay's aesthetic philosophy, grounded in English romantic poetry (de Kay was a poet in his own right), the German idealists, and, especially, the writings of the Transcendentalists Emerson and Thoreau. De Kay thrilled over the Tiffany stained-glass windows in Evans's house, finding in the opalescent glass, "the love for tones that are glad, not too brilliant, warm and gay, not garish or flat, which form the general characteristics of his collection of paintings." After enumerating all of Evans's good works, supplying clubs with his paintings, helping artists through "the depressive effects of the war," and founding the National Arts Club, de Kay ends with a coda in praise of this very American Medici-like figure. "It is a pleasant thought that while he naturally takes to cheery, charming, and romantic works of art, his demand for pictures of that sort reacts on the artists and encourages them to attempt the more difficult feats in art by selecting what is noble and elevating in nature and crystallizing it into enduring beauty."[26]

William T. Evans was a colossus of the turn-of-the-century art world. His tastes were writ large in his collecting, the Lotos Club exhibitions he organized, and the prizes he funded. Through sympathetic media figures like de Kay in the *New York Times* and *The Century Magazine* under de Kay's brother-in-law William Gilder, Evans's demand for Tonalist landscapes did more than just influence artists: it demonstrated to them how to make a living in art. For an artist to be bought by Evans—to be pursued by him as the collector pursued J. Francis Murphy, for example—was to receive a guarantee of sales. The Lotos Club exhibitions became synonymous with Evans and the coterie of collectors and critics who admired the Tonalist landscape for its all-American qualities and competitive advantage in the world market for art. A "Lotos Club landscape" became descriptive of the type of low-toned landscape Evans favored. Artists like Charles Harold Davis understood the style that would fare better in Evans's eyes. Davis (who by 1900 employed both his early tonal style and an updated sunny impressionistic one), writing to his dealer William Macbeth, asked Macbeth to send the artist's "Sunset Clouds" to a Lotos Club exhibition because "[t]he former may be a little more Lotos Club & stand less chance of being hung in some outside overflow place it being quite properly tonal in character. If Mr. Evans or one of the powers that be should happen in, a choice between the two might be left to the potentate."[27] Davis, given his facile flair as a technician, was quite able to combine the moodiness of his earlier tonal style with more energized brushstrokes derived from Impressionist facture, as in his *All Hallows Eve*, 1907 (fig. 6.15).

Between 1886 and 1912 more than 120 artists joined the Lotos Club—a membership list that constituted a roster of the important Tonalists, all eager to share in the group's exhibiting and publicity apparatus as well as to obtain the ultimate imprimatur, a sale to William T. Evans. When Evans left a sizable portion of his collection to the Smithsonian Institution (now the National Museum of American Art), the huge bequest to the nation was described in *The Century Magazine* as setting forth "the elemental impulses which have gone towards producing a native art. The loosing of old traditions and the finding of new ideals."[28]

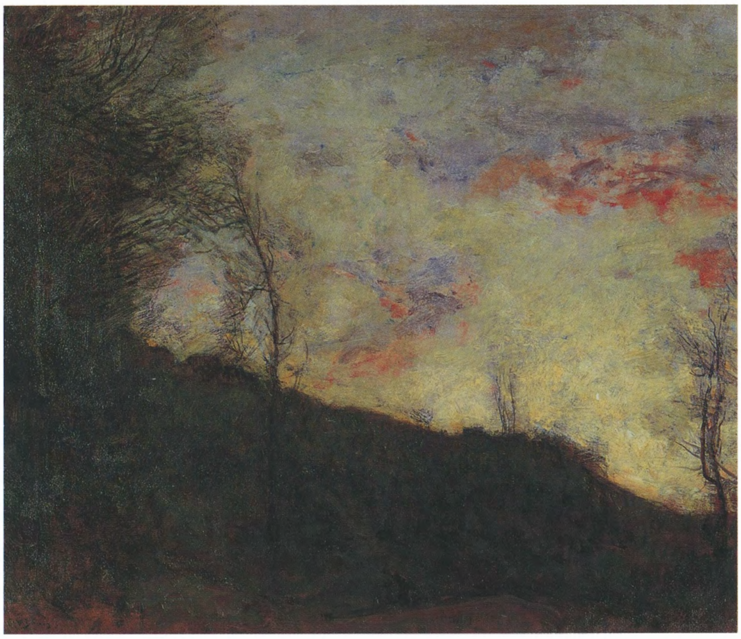


Fig. 6.15. Charles Harold Davis, *All Hallows Eve*, 1907. Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in. The O'Brien Collection of American Art, Sewickley, PA.

The Society of Landscape Painters and The Ten

It is in light of the growing dominance of the Tonalist movement after the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and the near-deification of Inness after his death, that two significant events in the New York art world of the late 1890s can be best understood: the breakaway of The Ten in 1897, and the formation of the Society of Landscape Painters in 1898. In late 1897 a group of ten painters resigned from the Society of American Artists to start their own exhibiting group; they became known as the Ten American Painters, or The Ten, and counted Edward Simmons, Willard Metcalf, Childe Hassam, J. Alden Weir, Robert Reid, Frank Benson, Edmund Tarbell, Joseph DeCamp, Thomas Dewing, and John Henry Twachtman (Chase replaced Twachtman on his death in 1902) as members. Much speculation followed The Ten's defection from the elite ranks of the society, both at the time and in recent scholarship. Various reasons were broached then and now: dissatisfaction with the growing conservatism of the society as the onetime radicals moved in a more conventional direction; a break by Impressionists from the prevailing Tonalist landscape mode of the society; peeves and resentments over real or perceived slights in terms of jury selection or hanging; and complaints of growing commercialization in the ranks of the society. All of these rationales carry some weight, but the broader dynamics of the New York art world and matters of a largely commercial nature, as well as self-interest, contributed to the decision of these artists to create an independent exhibiting society. As critics of the day noted, The Ten were not just members of the society but also sat on its juries and were prize-winners.

By 1896 enthusiasm for Impressionism within the society (its heyday had run from around 1890 to 1895) and especially among the axis of the Lotos Club, William T. Evans and the Gilder circle, was waning. The emergence of Tonalism as a force at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair continued with strong showings during the late 1890s, at the society, the National Academy, the Lotos Club, and other associations. In progressive circles, Impressionism was flickering out as a dynamic, forward-leaning style (as had long been the case in Europe)—and worse, many found it thoroughly un-American, more attuned to genteel Europhiles, especially of old Boston vintage, and their cosmopolitan lifestyles. For those members of The Ten not painting Tonalist landscapes or figurative works like Thomas Dewing, commercial and critical success was increasingly hard to come by in the late 1890s. In addition, the economic depression of 1893–97 prompted many artists to seek alternative outlets and new ways to generate publicity for their work. In the end, by exhibiting in the smaller, more intimate commercial gallery of Durand-Ruel (and later in other venues in Boston and elsewhere), the breakaway artists of The Ten hoped to gain both wider recognition for their commitment to the highest standards of traditional craftsmanship in painting, and a better atmosphere for the display of their work. Nevertheless, critical and commercial success would remain elusive until improved economic times arrived after 1900.

In general, the critics were respectful of The Ten, if nonplussed at their motives for breaking with the once radical Society of American Artists. Charles de Kay's review of the first exhibition of The Ten in 1898 at the Durand-Ruel Galleries in New York (famous for showing French Impressionism) reminded his readers that "Ten" members Weir and Twachtman had themselves been society radicals in the early days of secession from the National Academy of Design. "A generation passes, and the Society of American Artists in turn becomes the object of criticism by a few younger and older painters of advanced ideas, because, as they assert, it is departing from the art and is worshipping instead the commercial idea. . . ."[29] In a later review, de Kay's skeptical attitude toward this anti-commercial elitist argument is clear, given that The Ten were establishing themselves in the commercial Durand-Ruel Galleries, with a smaller more focused exhibition, which de Kay thought a good thing, a move clearly prompted to promote sales. "Clever and interesting," though, "not great," and de Kay notes that the "atmosphere of the display in general is that of modern French Impressionism." De Kay goes on to praise these diligent students of Impressionism for their originality and individuality—a great improvement on the derivative "reflections," and "copies" of French Impressionism in the society exhibition being held concurrently. As the years passed, the exhibitions of the Ten provided much fodder for the critics, who questioned the members' justification for seceding from the society, and alternately praised or criticized the "Sacred Ten" for various artistic presumptions, real or imagined. Though not truly Impressionists, in look and feel Impressionist remained the most easily graspable label to describe The Ten. De Kay noted an absence "of sentiment, of anecdote, of historical associations, or of imagination. These clever painters have attained to great skill in brushwork, but what they have to say is uttered for the fellow-artist and the connoisseur. Their powers reach that far, but not beyond. Rather than risk telling a poor story or exposing their inner man by the exhibition of sentiment which might fall flat and cause the cynical and uncharitable to scoff, they keep to the safe side, and are content to be little masters of technique."[30] What is most compelling about de Kay's criticism is that it is less anti-Impressionist than it is anti-elitist—calling for a populist, full-blooded American art. It is noteworthy that Twachtman's "exquisite" landscapes drew high praise from de Kay in the same review.

Dewing, too, was generally well received by reviewers; his technical talents and high-flown aesthetic ambiguities remained unquestioned. An elitist at heart, Dewing could always depend on Charles Freer and other deep-pocketed collectors to keep him afloat financially; in turn, Dewing tended to look down on his fellow New Englanders, the brilliant painters and technicians William Paxton (*Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1900, fig. 6.16), Joseph DeCamp, and Frank Benson (*Henry's Tent, North Haven, Maine*, 1921, fig 6.17), for their sunny Impressionism and fundamentally old-fashioned narrative modes. The New York reviewers gave the Boston contingent short shrift (an ironic reversal from decades before when the Boston art scene had been in the forefront of innovation), often praising the artists' technical facility but finding little new in their Monet-inspired work. Twachtman almost always drew high praise from critics like de Kay, although he had difficulty selling his late Tonalist landscapes, which employed aspects of Impressionist facture and broken, jagged brushstrokes to create his complex and abstract visual poetry, replete with sensuous surfaces of an often dry and opaque quality. Twachtman's close friend J. Alden Weir seems to have been the darling of critics, who rarely failed to praise the many landscapes he annually displayed. Weir, too, strayed into Impressionist handling but always retained a Tonalist feel for the landscape views of his Branchville farm, especially as Tonalism increased its aesthetic

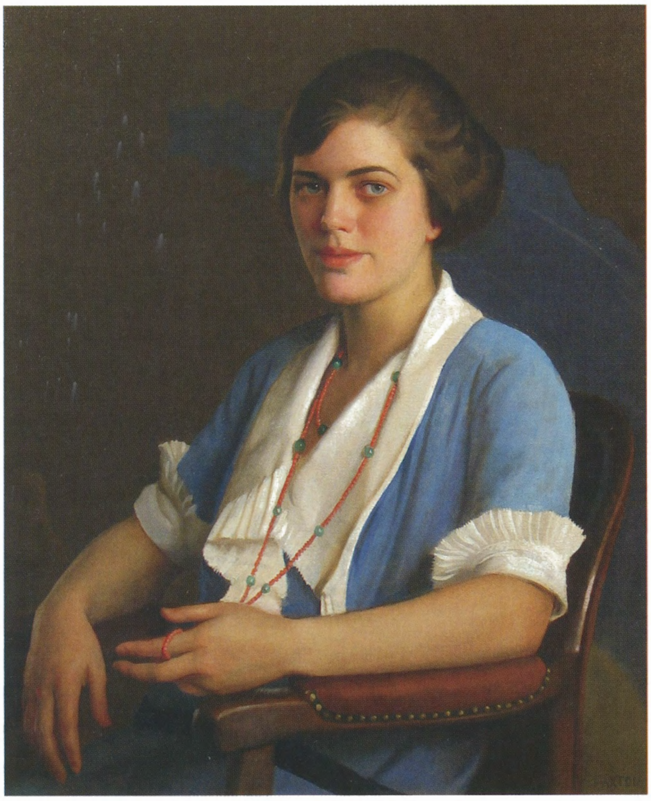


Fig. 6.16. William Paxton, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20¼ in. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

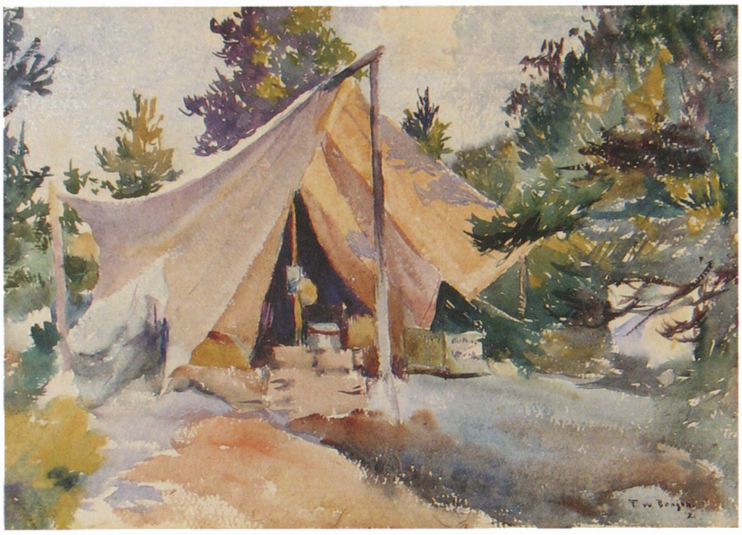


Fig. 6.17. Frank Benson, *Henry's Tent, North Haven, Maine*, 1921. Watercolor on paper, 13½ x 19 in. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

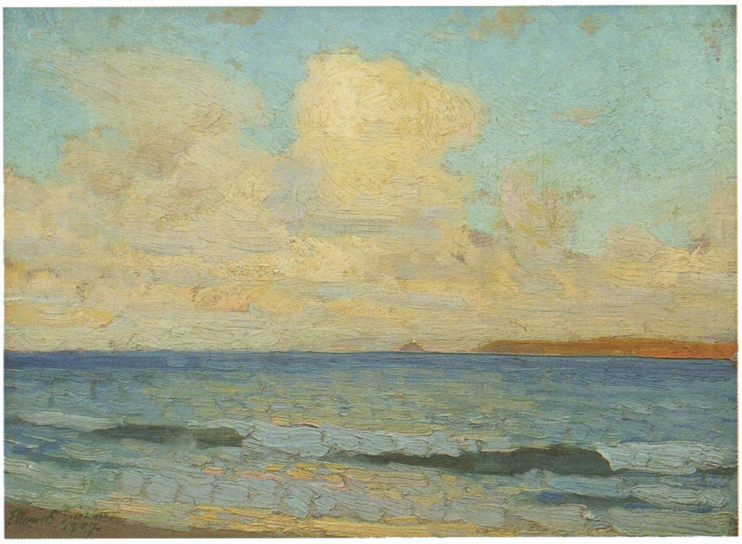


Fig. 6.18. Edward Simmons, *Coast of Nantucket*, 1897. Oil on panel, 10¼ x 14 in. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

dominance after 1900. Edward Simmons produced some supremely beautiful Tonalist marines along the Cornwall coast and later in New England (*Coast of Nantucket*, 1897; fig. 6.18), but was often absent from exhibitions, distracted from a commitment to easel painting by portraiture and his work as a muralist. Childe Hassam, though perfectly capable of refined Whistlerian work, especially around 1890 when he produced his windblown pastels and watercolors of the Isle of Shoals (at the same time he helped found the New York Water Color Club), remained the most firmly committed Impressionist among The Ten, "the neo-impressionist whose chief apostle in America he remains."[31] Willard Metcalf painted many poetic landscapes of snow-covered hills that display a decidedly Tonalist flair for ethereality, even when employing the more broken brushwork of academic Impressionism (*Spring*, c. 1900; fig. 6.19). Robert Reid, often described by critics as a decorative artist, painted some of the most dazzling and gloriously colored figurative works of The Ten, influencing the Boston artists DeCamp, Benson, and Edmund Tarbell along similar lines.

However they were defined over their twenty-some-year exhibiting history, The Ten stood for conservative tastes and a tradition of gentility presented in a warm, derivative Impressionist style—a style already being taught in art schools as a quasi-classical technique of painting, and already decades out-of-date by 1900. It was no accident that The Ten used Durand-Ruel Galleries for their early exhibitions: Durand-Ruel was Monet's dealer and had been the first dealer to introduce the French Impressionists in New York. Dewing, Twachtman, Weir, and Hassam, and occasionally Chase, Reid, and Tarbell did figure in the collections of the major New York collectors at the turn of the century—particularly William T. Evans, who bought their more tonal works (Thomas Clarke had at least one Twachtman and Hassam), but with the exception of Dewing, prices for the works of The Ten in the Clarke and Evans sales of 1899 and 1900 were modest compared to the many thousands brought by the works of Inness, Wyant, Martin, and increasingly Tryon and Murphy. This partly explains why most members of The Ten were reliant on teaching and portraiture to make ends meet; much of their stellar reputation rested on their superb abilities as art instructors.

In a 1903 article titled *Art Movements of Today: The So-Called Passing of Impressionism*, in the Boston-based *National*

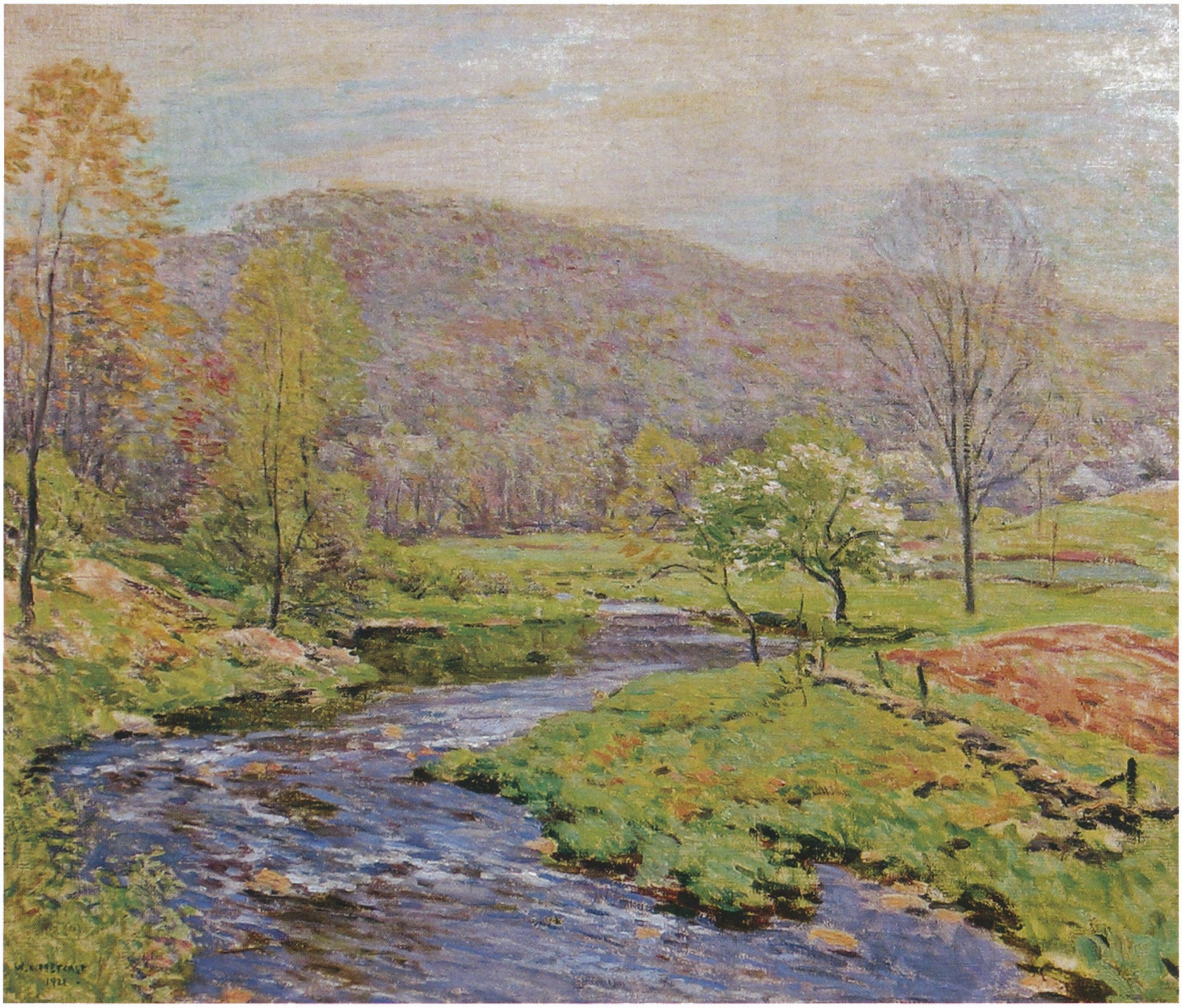


Fig. 6.19. Willard Metcalf, *Spring*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 21 x 25 in. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

Magazine, the art writer Frederick W. Coburn noted the demise of American Impressionism: "The disciples of Monet and Sisley in this country are somehow losing their grip to such an extent that one hears the phrase 'the passing of impressionism.' It is certainly true that the leading art exhibitions of the past two or three years have contained relatively fewer of the red-yellow-blue symphonies in high key than did the exhibitions of, say, ten years ago, as well as rather more—at least so far as the characteristically American field of landscape painting is concerned—of rich, low-toned compositions, conceived and executed after the spirit that had inspired the big landscapists of this country—such men as George Inness, A. H. Wyant, Homer Martin and Winslow Homer—long before the cult of impressionism reached these shores... Strictly speaking, the movement [in American art] is away from impressionism.... The grayer, more somber appearances—those which Wyant and Winslow Homer learned to render poetically years ago—are still preferred by the picture-buying public. So that a reaction in favor of low-toned landscape has come about in recent years.... Such men as Arthur Hoeber and Ben Foster [have renounced] study of broad sunlight in favor of interpretation of the deeper, more soulful aspects of twilight nature—renderings into which a man may crowd greater fullness of intention—to use Mr. La Farge's phrase—than into that painting which sacrifices much to obtain a little."[32] John La Farge's critique of Impressionism—that it was, in essence, a one-trick pony, lacking the full range of visual emotions available to the Tonalist painter—was echoed by critics like de Kay, and was certainly not a reactionary argument but a studied viewpoint that grasped the limitations of Impressionism beyond its historically important innovations of the 1870s. Another modernist critic, Charles Caffin, in his 1909 monograph of the work of Dwight Tryon, saw the failure of Impressionism, certainly on American shores, as a failure to plumb the underlying structure of landscape that provided the most profound insights to the artist. "In the analysis of values the facts of form were often overlooked, and thus one truth was sacrificed to another. Further, the [Impressionist] painter, intent upon suggesting the momentary or fugitive impressions of a scene, would often stop short of achieving also the finer qualities of technique. The craftsmanship was often inefficient and unbeautiful. Such were the sacrifices that for a time, as every student of the history of art knows, the new impressionism imposed on the natural representation of landscape; and it is because the majority of American landscape painters have succeeded in effecting a compromise, in which form, light, and craftsmanship are duly considered, that they constitute today a group of artists unsurpassed in sincerity and achievement."[33] Caffin echoes critiques of Impressionism by La Farge and Birge Harrison, who promoted an art that elicited a concrete symbology but one softened by immaterial atmosphere, less a moment in time than a moment transcended to reveal the enduring beauties and uncertainties of existence. This goes far in helping to understand that the conservative classicism of the Boston school, epitomized by Benson, DeCamp, and Tarbell, along with the likes of Reid and Hassam and their "neo-impressionist" followers, provided the main target for The Eight in the group's 1908 revolt against prevailing norms. This faux-Impressionism of sunlit gardens and sparkling seacoasts, of genteel women dressed in their breezy finery—outdoors or in dimly lit interiors, evoking the old-money charm of upper-class Boston and couched in the timeless whispering palette of Vermeer—proved to be the central focus of complaint for the rising urban realists of the Ashcan School and American Post-Impressionists. In turn, the Amory Show of 1913 buried these purveyors of establishment charm in terms of relevance to modernist trends in American art.

The example of The Ten and the still-challenging economic conditions of the late 1890s prompted another very different group of society members to start their own exhibiting group, the Society of American Landscape Painters—soon changed to the Society of Landscape Painters to avoid confusion with the American Society of Artists. The original membership consisted of Tonalist painters George H. Bogert, Walter Clark, William A. Coffin, Bruce Crane, Robert Swain Gifford, Frederick W. Kost, Robert C. Minor, J. Frank Murphy, Leonard Ochtman, Walter Launt Palmer, Henry Ward Ranger (later to be replaced by Charles Harold Davis), and Carleton Wiggins. Between 1899 and 1903 the Society of Landscape Painters held five exhibitions. By all indications this group of like-minded Tonalists, all members of the Lotos Club (many were protégés of Evans and collected by him), banded together in a very informal structure without bothering with juries or hanging committees, simply to provide themselves an added opportunity to show and sell their work. Unlike The Ten, the Society of Landscape Painters had no ulterior or ideological motive other than exploiting what was clearly a strengthening market for Tonalist landscapes around the turn of the century. By joining forces and distinguishing themselves as landscapists, the artists may indeed have been claiming a new dignity and even exceptionality for the American Tonalist landscape, certainly in retrospect, although practical commercial issues were probably paramount in 1899, just as the economic malaise of the mid-1890s was lifting. Critics largely praised the first exhibition in 1899; though plentiful (184 pictures), it was refreshing for many critics to see a broad cross-section of American landscape painting, without the mixing in of distracting figurative work.[34] The exhibition seems to have been a commercial success and was subsequently held in Chicago without many of the sold works; J. Francis Murphy exhibited ten paintings and eight sketches, selling seven works for $980.60, which gave him much comfort after the hard times of recent years.[35]

The Society of Landscaped Painters' 1900 exhibition was smaller (155 pictures) and drew more glowing reviews. The *New York Times* critic—who was almost certainly de Kay, judging from the reviewer's lecturing tone—described the 1900 exhibition in terms of a watershed in American art: "These twelve painters are thoroughly representative of the American landscape art of the present day. There are a few others who might be added to their ranks, but the lover of American landscape art and the believer in its future will find the work of these twelve men satisfactory as to present fulfillment and filled with abundant promise . . . No man or woman of art taste or cultivation can be insensible to the general high average, technical skill, and strong character of this display . . . One gratifying feature of the exhibition is the originality and individuality of each painter's work. Here is no slavish yielding to any but the best influences of this or that foreign school. Here are not mediocre Cazins, weak Duprés, and direct reflections of Corot, Rousseau, or, as is the case in most other art exhibitions now held in America, Monets, Sisleys, and Pissarros, signed with other names."[36]

For more than twenty years de Kay had been proselytizing for the cause of "originality and individuality" in American art. If a single group could encapsulate the distinctive spirit of progressive American art for de Kay, the Society of Landscape Painters was probably as close to fitting the bill as was possible. He even confirms his own judgment—"the painters represented had so much of originality . . . " De Kay goes on to divide the artists into realists and romantics (a term he had used in his review of Evans's collection in 1898), a distinction hard to fathom except that the so-called romantics tended in the exhibition to display more mystery, poetry, and melancholy. Minor was "the oldest of the twelve (a romantic), and whose artistic soul is so permeated with the love of nature in her milder and lighter and again in her more mysterious moods that he seems to be always reaching out toward the grasping of some airy dream which just fails of becoming substance" (*Near New London*, c. 1900, see fig. 6.3). Ochtman, also a romanticist, is stronger and more virile; his work abounds in sentiment—the sentiment of youth, as opposed to Minor's melancholy sentiment of age. Charles Harold Davis was perhaps overly influenced by French Impressionism in his use of activated brushwork: "He is a little in danger of losing that sentiment and that indefinable softness and tenderness of color which gave him through his early landscapes such deserved reputation" (see *Under Summer Skies*, not reviewed by de Kay, c. 1905, fig. 6.20). Murphy, de Kay wrote, "is beginning to remind one of Wyant in the later period. He affects the same subjects and has the same delicate color scheme of light grays and blues which the older and now dead painter in his later period employed. Mr. Murphy's art grows better each succeeding year [see *Summer Meadow,* not reviewed by de Kay, circa 1900; fig. 6.21) . . . Bruce Crane it may be said that he goes from strength to strength . . . R. Swain Gifford, who has not been as frequently represented of late years in American exhibitions as his admirers would like, comes to the front in the present display with five old time landscapes, full of his accustomed vigor, and with a splendid sweep of air and sky. No other American painter has so intelligently and strongly interpreted the American Altlantic Coast—and particularly those broad stretches of moorlands and storm-beaten trees of the dunes of the New England shores . . . F. W. Kost . . . earnest and sincere . . . has found his inspiration in the marshes that line the south beach of Staten Island, and here and there along the Jersey coast . . . Very good . . . in composition and color, but excellent as are both his large canvases, some of his oil studies are really superior both in tone and color."[37] (Works by Kost from this period include *Hillside Boulders*, c. 1900, fig. 6.22, and *Billowing Trees*, c. 1910, fig. 6.23)

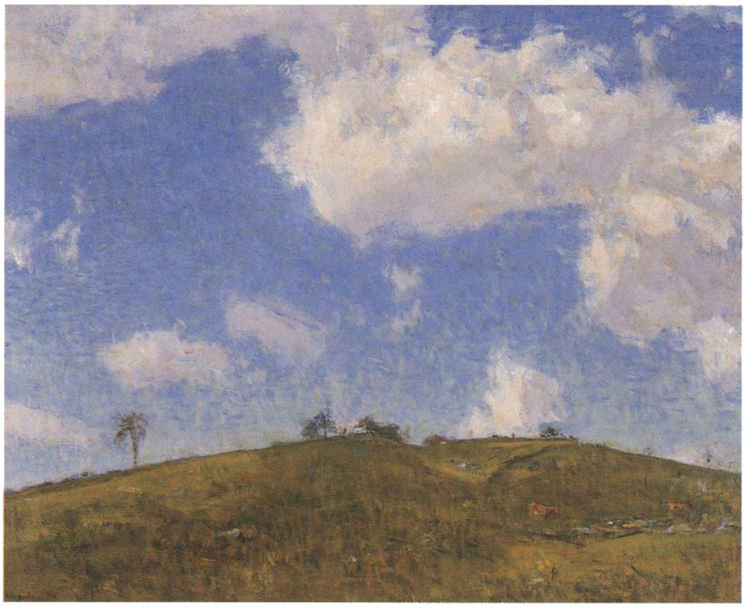


Fig. 6.20. Charles Harold Davis, *Under Summer Skies*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. Courtesy Garzoli Gallery, San Rafael, CA.

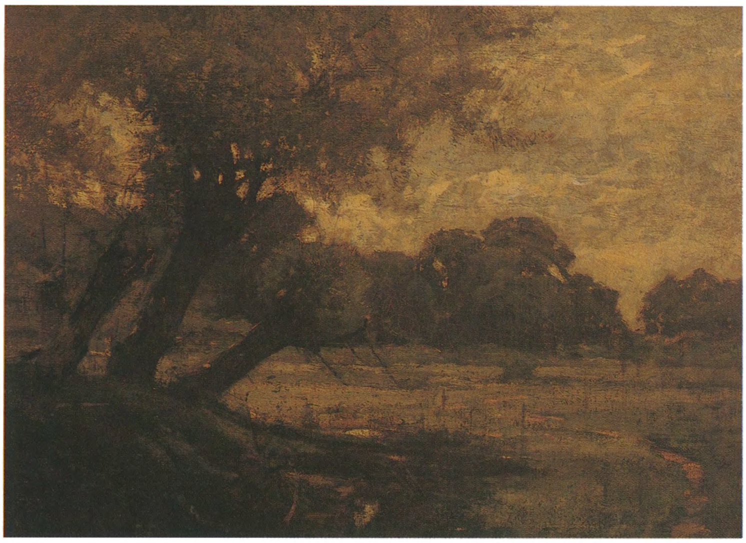


Fig. 6.21. J. Francis Murphy, *Summer Meadow*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

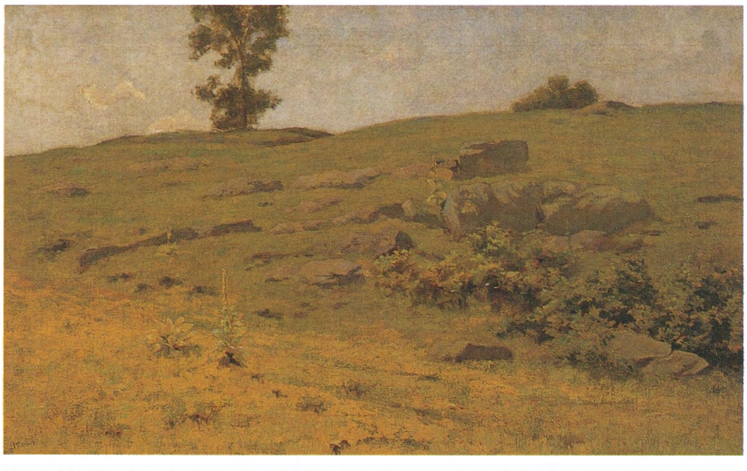


Fig. 6.22. Frederick W. Kost, *Hillside Boulders*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 16 x 26 in. Private collection.

This snapshot of reaction to some of the leading members of the Society of Landscape Artists (de Kay astutely caught Davis's move to a more brushy facture and Murphy's transition to his spare, melancholy late style) gives an idea of the progressive criteria critics like de Kay were employing in 1900, and the standing of the dominant landscape Tonalists on the brink of the Paris Exposition Universelle of that summer. It is no coincidence that de Kay's emphasis on art expressive of dreams, ambiguity, wonder, and the imagination would be found in abundance across the spectrum of international styles in Paris. If de Kay could have added artists to fully represent the best Tonalists of the American school, he probably would have chosen Twachtman, Charles Warren Eaton, Dewey, Weir, Foster, and Tryon (and possibly dropped a few like Walter Clark, Carleton Wiggins, and George Bogert, who never figured highly in his reviews). The final exhibits of the Society of Landscape Painters, in 1901, 1902, and 1903, grew progressively smaller and do not seem to have impressed

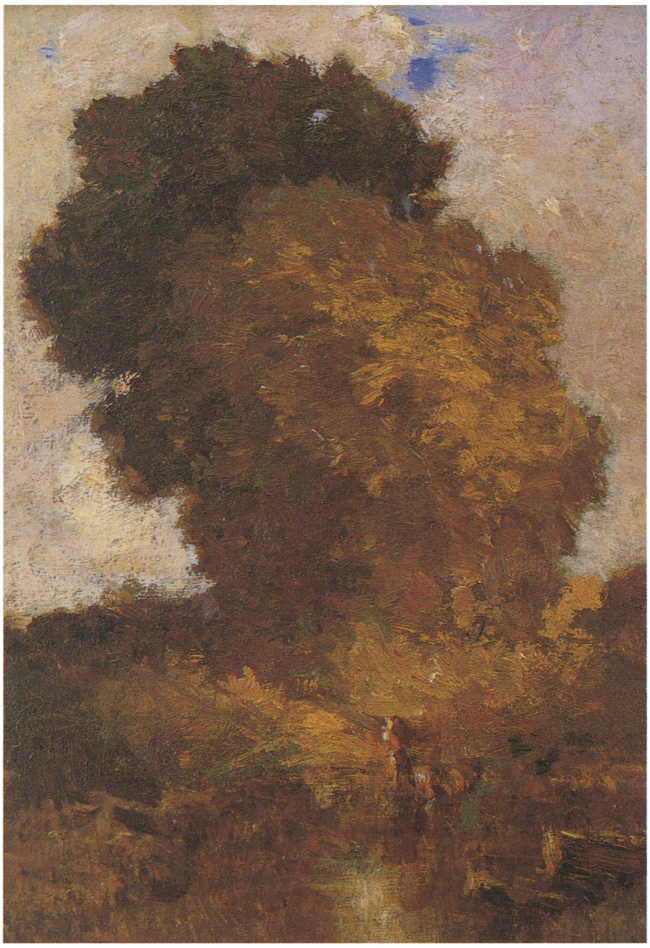


Fig. 6.23. Frederick W. Kost, *Billowing Trees*, c. 1910. Oil on panel, 9 x 14 in. Private collection.

the critics as particularly distinctive or important as the art world expanded rapidly in scope after 1900. Perhaps of all the exhibitors, Frederick W. Kost, may have benefited most as his career seems to have gained much critical momentum with a string of glowing reviews. A newly booming market for Tonalist landscapes after 1900 offered many new alternative venues for the artists: the short-lived Society of Landscape Artists became redundant in an art scene where the Tonalist landscape was ubiquitous. The fact that the Ten continued to exhibit until 1919 probably speaks more to their need to exploit a declining market niche than their continued popularity.

The artists of the Society of Landscape Painters were the direct heirs of Inness, Wyant, and Martin, by then all deceased; by joining forces the society's artists were publicly embracing the dispensation of the spiritualized "civilized landscape" championed by George Inness and notions for a national art long held by Inness's supporters within the art establishment represented by de Kay, Evans, Clarke, and the Gilder circle. By 1900, the Tonalist landscape had become the lodestar of a distinctive American art. As a group, the Society of Landscape Painters had certainly benefited from Evans's Lotos Club publicity machine and marketing knowledge. And as a cohesive movement of like-minded artists, whose works hung in all the best clubs and collections in New York—the establishment's adored poets of silent melancholy and slow time—they were as close as the Tonalists ever got to forming a distinctive school or issuing a formal manifesto. That they never did, that they remained an informal exhibiting group, in some ways captures their distinctive American "originality and individuality"—comfortable to let their art speak for itself.

Charles Melville Dewey (1849–1937): The Forgotten Master of Tonalism

The great reliance in this history on the reviews and writings of Charles de Kay is only partly because of his position at the epicenter of the Tonalist movement for more than thirty years, during which time the critic ceaselessly promoted his progressive tastes in art. Of equal weight was his remarkable connoisseurship and sharp eye for quality: he had an uncanny ability to sort the great and good and also-rans among the artists in his day. His opinions on artists, those he adored or dismissed, or did not bother to review, have stood up remarkably well over time. Among the members of the Society of Landscape Painters he barely mentions Walter Clark, Carleton Wiggins, and George Bogert—important names in their day, but who in retrospect seem to be second- and third-tier artists. De Kay did not care much for Walter Launt Palmer because he found Palmer's signature snow scenes redundant and lacking character. He did have praise for Robert C. Minor, who had talent but was never able to break from European traditions and establish a personal statement. He could be ambivalent about Hugh Bolton Jones or William Coffin because of their stylistic idiosyncrasies. The artists de Kay trumpeted, however—his early embrace of Inness, Martin, and Wyant, Currier, Muhrman, Twachtman, and Bunce, Ryder and Blakelock, and later Bellows and Henri—have held up remarkably well. It is de Kay, more than any other critic, who consistently revealed the breadth of quality and talent in the Tonalist movement. As has been noted in the introduction, it is the rediscovery of these talented artists that further substantiates the importance of the Tonalist movement in American art. No artist received more praise from de Kay than Charles Melville Dewey. Before turning to the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, it is worth pausing to examine the accomplishments of Dewey, and the equally unrecognized and forgotten Frederick W. Kost and Charles Harry Eaton, all favorites of de Kay.

Of all the great disappearing acts in American art history, Charles Melville Dewey's is one of the strangest and most total (fig. 6.24). Few Tonalist artists of the period received more glowing notices by critics and were more widely admired and ensconced in elite art circles, only to have left so little in the way of a footprint. The man and his art virtually vanished from sight

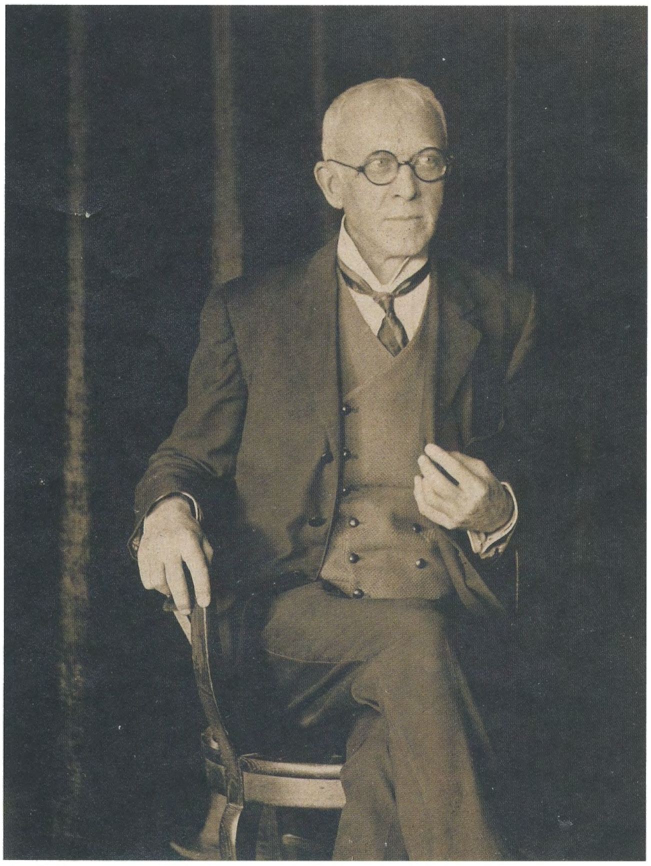


Fig. 6.24. Charles Melville Dewey, photographed c. 1925. Courtesy Macbeth Gallery records, 1838–1963, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

after 1930. Even today, it is rare to come upon his beautifully crafted and exquisite paintings, and only a few of his late works are to be found in museums. If J. Francis Murphy might be considered the classic master of the Tonalist landscape, Dewey embodied the style with classic form, technical finesse, and indwelling feeling second to none. Murphy may have been a more conceptual experimenter and expressive genius, but Dewey expressed a depth of refinement and glittering nuance that left his contemporaries breathless with praise.

Born in Lowville, New York, to a farming family, Dewey may have suffered from a long childhood illness, possibly lasting years, during which the invalid read literature and developed a romantic attachment to nature. His family did not support his artistic streak and so Dewey struggled in his early years, working as a janitor to fund his art training. He first studied at the National Academy of Design in 1869 and continued to do so, off and on, until 1876, the date he first exhibited at the Academy. His lifelong friendship with Albert Pinkham Ryder probably dated from 1870 when Ryder first entered the National Academy school. Dewy studied in Paris with Carolus-Duran for two winters, 1876–78 (where he was a friend of John Singer Sargent), and then returned to New York in 1878 and opened a studio. He was made a member of the Society of American Artists in 1881, a sure indication of his artistic standing by that time in the eyes of the most progressive American artists. Dewey and J. Francis Murphy (who did not become a member of the society until 1889) had an early following in advanced Boston collecting circles, exhibiting together in a two-man show at Doll & Richards in 1882. Dewey's *A Pool in the Meadow*, circa 1882 (fig. 6.25), was exhibited at the Society in 1883, and shows an affinity for rural subject matter along the lines of Murphy's work of the same period. *A Pool in the Meadow* has the classic look of Aesthetic Tonalism: superbly balanced, full of fetching patterns—especially in the oddly shaped cloud forms and the cart path formed by elongated patches of bare grass—and exquisitely matched green tones in the foreground and in the apple trees that vibrate and dance on the canvas with great warmth and charm. Though broadly brushed there is enough eye-catching detail, especially the foreground meadow flowers, and the scintillating reflections in the puddle, to draw the eye into the composition, while offering arresting moments in which lush textures, as well as hard and soft forms, fuse and fade and beguile the imagination. The feel of spring is conveyed not just in the glorious golden greens of the season but also in the perfect equipoise of all the elements, which merge to create a scrim of bucolic atmosphere, heavy with moisture-laden, fragrant air. A figurative work by Thomas Dewing was the controversial highlight of the society's annual exhibition of 1883, with its strong emphasis on decorative design and classical elegance, and here Dewey employs this compositional strategy brilliantly in an elegiac landscape mode and his vision of Arcadian America.

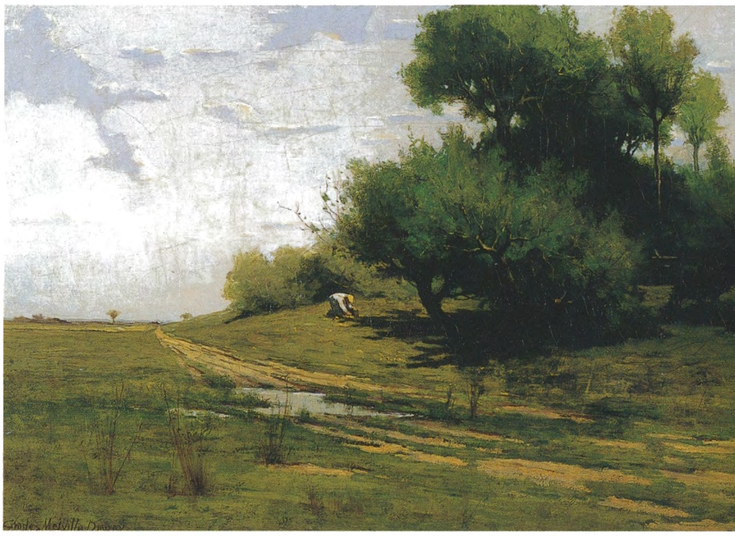


Fig. 6.25. Charles Melville Dewey, *A Pool in the Meadow*, c. 1882. Oil on canvas, 15 x 23 in. Private collection.

Another Dewey oil of the late 1880s, *Afternoon Shadows* (fig. 6.26), captures the enchanting quality of sunlight in late afternoon near the shoreline, possibly on Long Island Sound where the artist sometimes painted. Dewey's paint handling reveals a heightened refinement and delicacy, along with an ability to capture the most nuanced feel of natural light. The

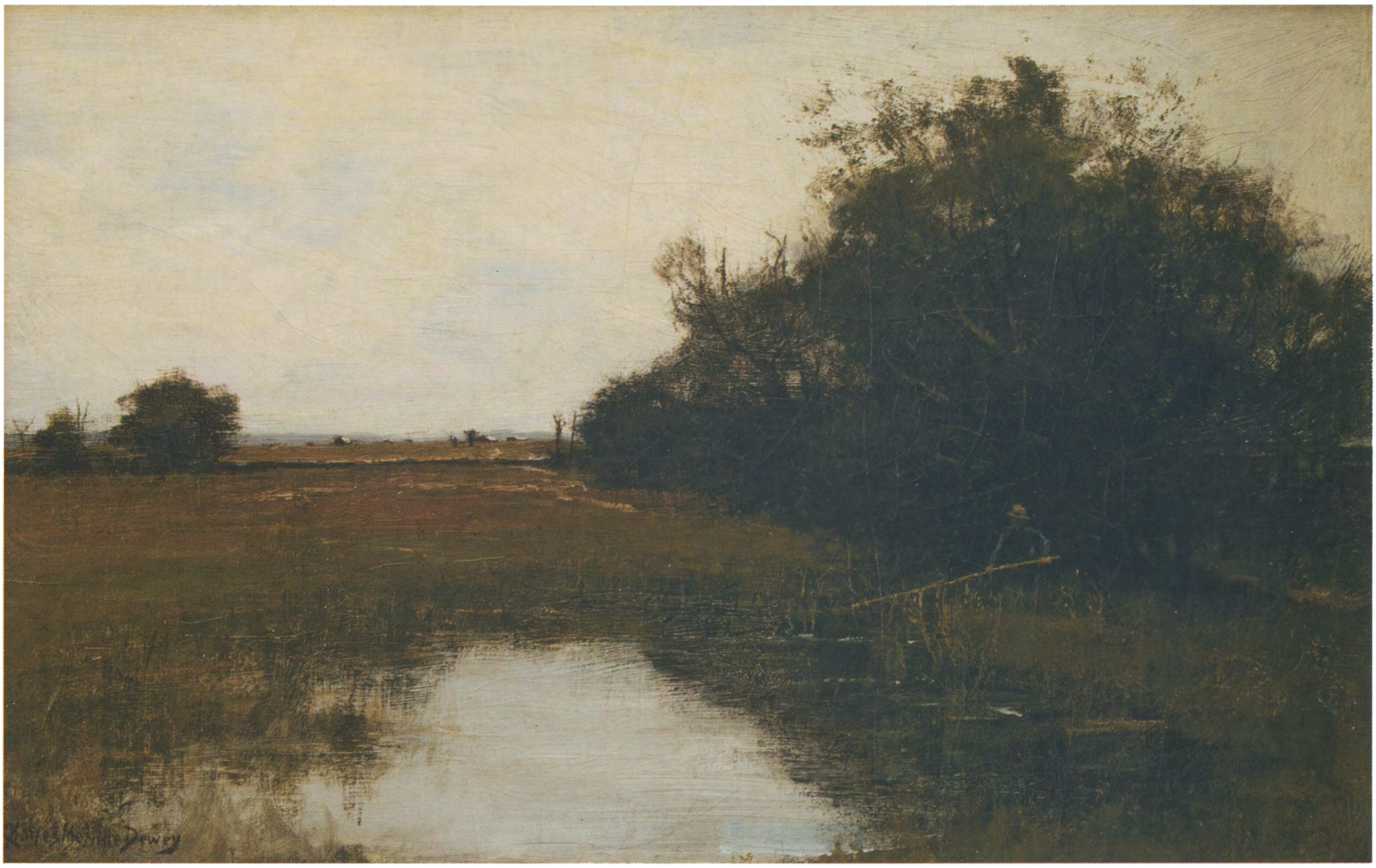


Fig. 6.26. Charles Melville Dewey, *Afternoon Shadows*, c. 1888. Oil on canvas, 9 x 14 in. Private collection.

pond in the foreground, reflecting the sky and illuminating and further softening the local colors of the meadow, was a favored device of Aesthetic Tonalism, taught by Thomas Dewing at the Art Students League, and used extensively by Alexander Wyant and later by J. Francis Murphy. *On the Marshes, Long Island,* c. 1890 (fig. 6.27), a grisaille on panel (probably exhibited at the Salmagundi Club, which had an annual exhibition of grisaille works), displays Dewey's free and expressive facture to great advantage. His ability, within the narrow scope of a monochromatic palette, to create a scene sparkling with luminous lighting effects and lush paint textures is a technical tour de force: a textbook example, too, of the manner in which a low-toned picture highlights the armature of the landscape and brings to vivid life the rhythmic play of forms in nature.

The rising status of Dewey in the American art world, on a par with Dwight Tryon, was heralded by the inclusion of four of his landscapes at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, two owned and lent by William T. Evans. *The Return of the Hayboats,* circa 1892 (fig. 6.28), lent by Evans, was one of the hits of the Fair. The painting shows Dewey moving beyond his 1880s style of Aesthetic Tonalism to a more broadly brushed and expressive facture—though carefully modulated in strict horizontal patterns—creating an overall bluish-green tonal scrim of atmosphere, which saturates and unites the scene in one palpitating vision. The human figure, which had played a minor role in Dewey's art in the 1880s, is here reduced to two ghostly forms with their backs to the viewer, more cutout geometries of rowers than real people. By the late 1890s, figures had entirely disappeared from Dewey's landscapes as from the work of most of his colleagues, especially those, like Robert Swain Gifford, born in the 1840s who retained a vestigial allegiance to older modes. Dewey's triumph as an artist was to get an effective balance between amorphous form and just enough

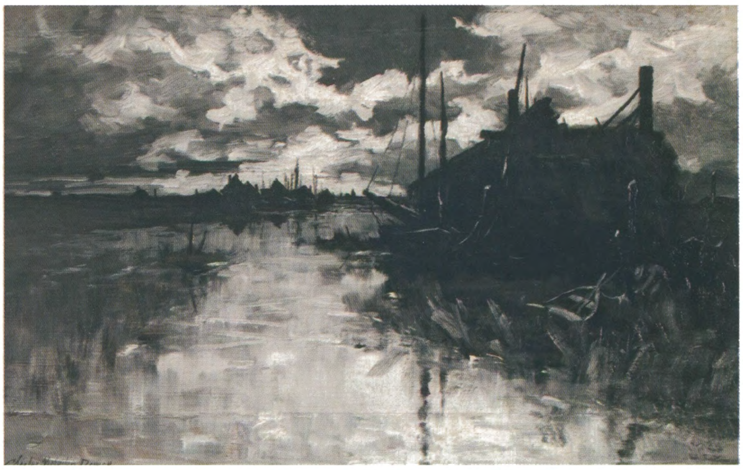


Fig. 6.27. Charles Melville Dewey, *On the Marshes, Long Island*, c. 1890. Grisaille on panel, 10 x 16 in. Private collection.

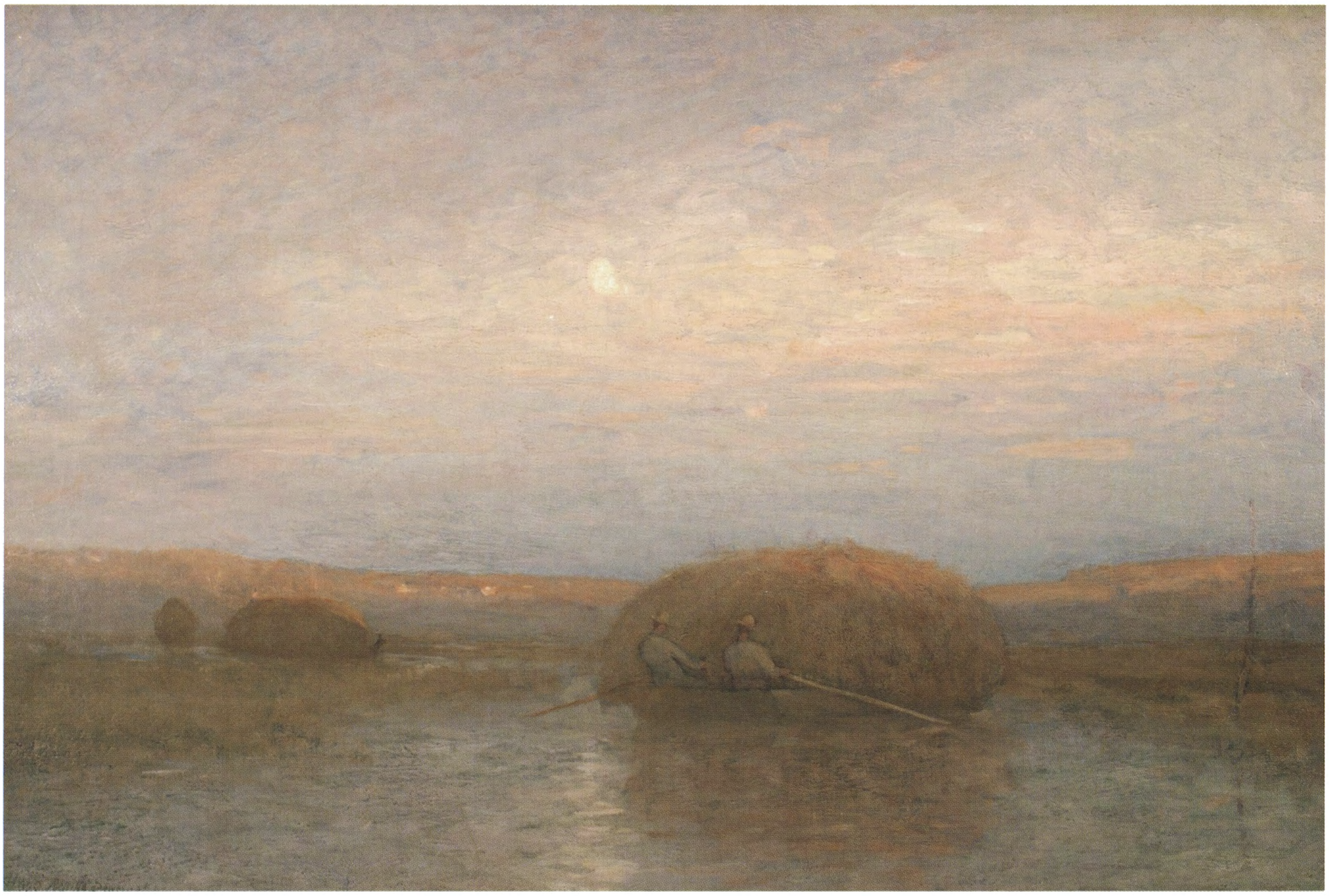


Fig. 6.28. Charles Melville Dewey, *The Return of the Hayboats*, c. 1892. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

hard-edged detail to anchor the composition, so that the large proportions, the character of the masses, and the balance of the values had a solidity that prevented the whole from deteriorating into mushy vapidity. Like Tryon, Dewey's many years of drawing from the figure and casts, both in the academy school and in Paris with Carolus-Duran, grounded the artist's feel for proportion and mass, even as his art moved in the direction of brooding and dreamy Expressive Tonalism. *The Return of the Hayboats* achieves this exquisite equipoise, not just by the elucidation of a few details emerging out of the morning mist, but by virtue of the crisp paint handling, in which even the merging of variegated tones is executed with finesse and painterly touches that create and retain visual interest, while forming lush surface textures that are a pleasure in their own right. This achievement was noted in a *New York Times* review (probably de Kay employing a pseudonym) of his work in Chicago. "Perhaps of all the landscapists in the United States rooms Charles Melville Dewey shows the most interesting canvases, as indicating a departure as individual and as valuable as that of the Barbizon painters. In these calm and lovely stretches of land and water, in this union of truth and mystery, of exquisite drawing and atmospheric breadth, of tender values and luminous color, is found an effort toward the beauty and poetry of nature that is neither hysterical nor sentimental, crude nor brutal, but quiet, sane, and intense, with the promise of becoming an enduring element in American art."[38] The comparison with Monet, especially the London nocturnes of 1903, is inevitable; though Dewey's precise and controlled horizontal facture retains an academic probity, the "quiet, sane, and intense" aspect noted in the *Times* review. Monet was seeking the momentary expression of hazy light; Dewey an internalized memory of an enduring and timeless moment of rapture. At the height of the Impressionist fervor in American art, Dewey provided an alternate Tonalist mode, much in keeping with Whistler's Nocturnes then exhibited at Chicago.

The Return of the Hayboats, first exhibited at the Society of American Artists in 1891, was shown—and highly praised—at the Munich International Exhibition of 1895, exhibited by Evans at the Lotos Club in 1899,[39] sold by Evans in 1900, included in the Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art, 1904 and exhibited again at the Lotos Club in 1905 and 1914 as part of the Rhoades Collection. In 1905 de Kay described Mr. Rhoades' taste as running "to the tonal work of our landscapists... so that a stroll about the galleries is a continuous appeal to the sense of pleasure given by rich low tones or by delicate vibrations of grays and browns... Here are Charles Melville Dewey's masterpiece, the dreamy 'Return of the Hayboats...'"[40] In 1914 the *Times* valued the painting as

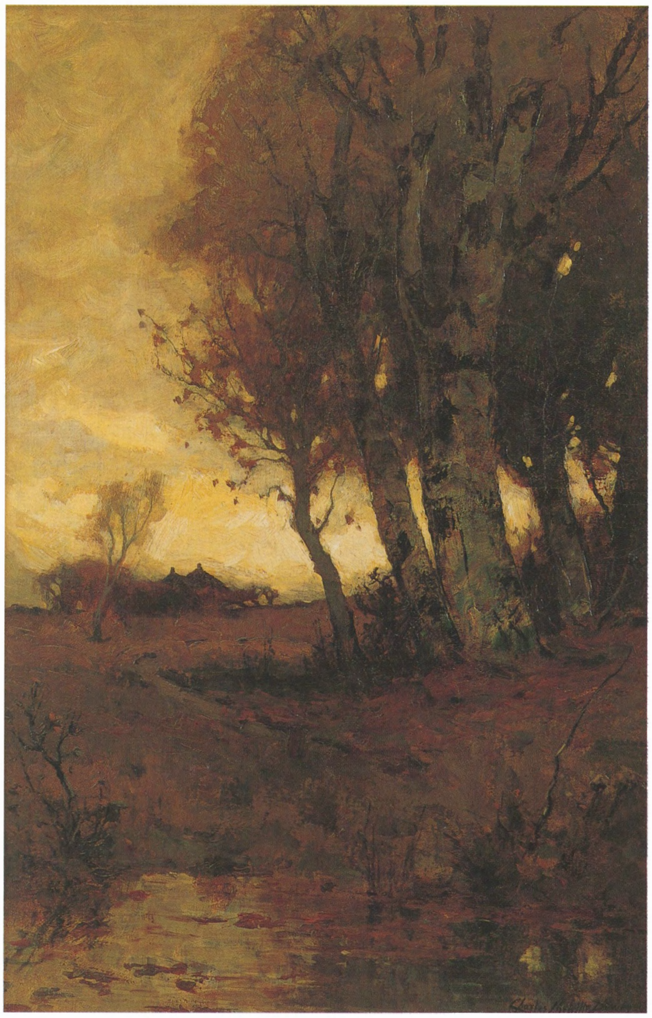


Fig. 6.29. Charles Melville Dewey, *Sunset after the Rain*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 24 x 16 in. Private collection.

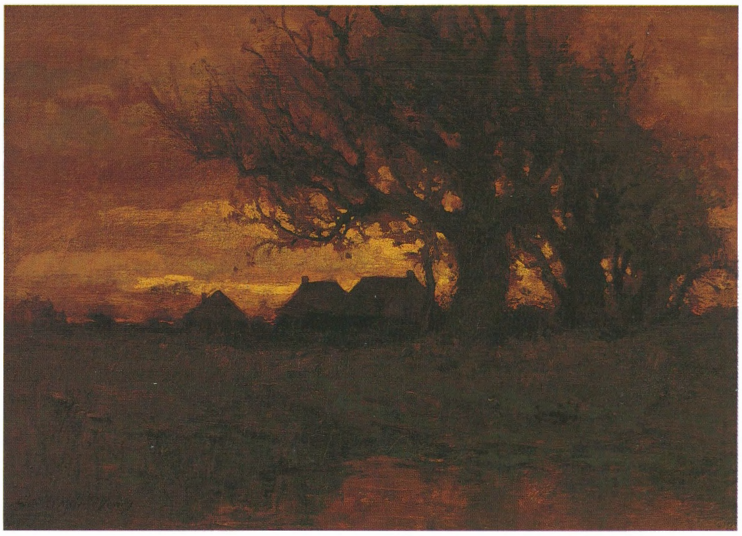


Fig. 6.30. Charles Melville Dewey, *Twilight Reverie*, c. 1900. Oil on panel, 8¼ x 11½ in. Private collection.

reiterating "his importance in the group by which American painting will be known to the long future . . . No one who has ridden on one of those slow-moving barges with the movement of the tide will be insensitive to the artist's subtle realization of this almost imperceptible progress of the loaded boat, as well as the deep serenity of the sky and water on a still day."[41]

Sunset after the Rain, circa 1895 (fig. 6.29), is an example of Dewey's ability to take fairly standard post-Barbizon imagery and imbue it with expressive character and grace. The narrow format emphasizes the vertical forms of the trees and the sinuous choreography of trunks and limbs that animates them, creating scintillating apertures of light—airy atmospheric forms carved from negative space that delight in their own right as passages of warm creamy pigment. The silhouetted trees rising exuberantly against the sky, especially at the low-angled perspective, have an uncanny anthropomorphic quality. An 1898 *Times* review by de Kay of an exhibition at the Kraushaar Gallery commented, "Mr. Dewey's attitude toward nature is always contemplative and grave. He chooses the pensive moments of the day for his most intimate study, and the result is synthetic—every detail contributes to reproduce the actual impression, the precise instant, that in nature is never permitted to linger."[42] *Twilight Reverie*, circa 1900 (fig. 6.30), has all the elements of a classic Tonalist sunset landscape with a strong, silhouetted recessional tree line and passages of sumptuous green that stand out from the foreground shadows. A review in 1901 of a Dewey exhibition at the Knoedler Gallery suggests that the artist had gone through a period of freer paint handling in the mid-1890s ("during which his painting grew rather loose in texture, soft, almost flocculent") probably in response to inroads of Impressionism, but had returned to a style of the measured craftsmanship of his earlier work. Whatever the case, Dewey seems to have embarked on a course of more low-toned and nocturnal scenes, which were growing in popularity after the turn of the century with the renewed interest in Whistler's expressive tenebrous modes and in Symbolist themes au courant in international art circles. The growing mania for buying Ralph Albert Blakelock's moonlights after 1900, as well as those of Dewey's close friend, Albert Pinkham Ryder, may well have influenced Dewey's *Golden Moonlight*, circa 1900 (fig. 6.31), which is serenely evocative of both Blakelock and Ryder, but composed with a jazzy paint handling verging on complete abstraction. Although Dewey never established a clear signature style or favored motif, his versatility and virtuosity allowed him to endow prevailing trends and modes with an artistry of deep emotion, as described by de Kay in 1901: "Each one . . . has the same inner charm, one that plainly springs from the artist's individuality, yet each has its own kindly and poetic song to sing, without sentimentality or gush, even and self-assured."[43]

If Dewey was drawn to evocations along the lines of Blakelock and Ryder, or Henry Ward Ranger's forest interiors, his superb artistry and broad painterly facture and surface textures captured subtleties rarely touched on by others, "an

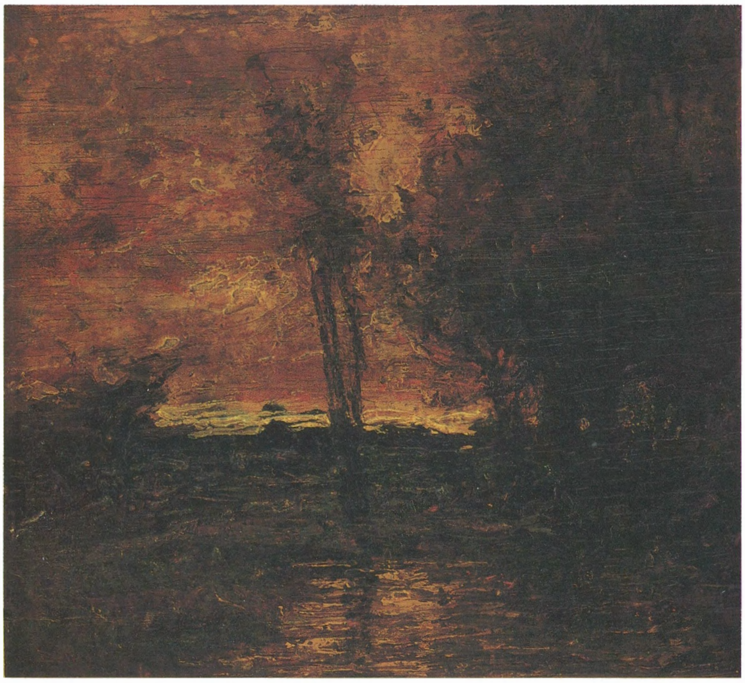


Fig. 6.31. Charles Melville Dewey, *Golden Moonlight*, c. 1900. Oil on panel, 6 x 7 in. Private collection.

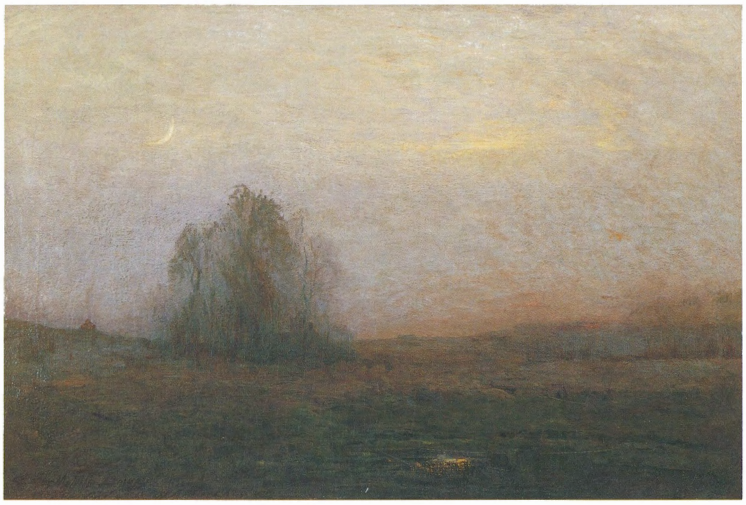


Fig. 6.32. Charles Melville Dewey, *Moonlit Reverie*, c. 1908. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

idealist and brooder over the effects of color on the mind,"[44] as de Kay described him in 1907. "One of the most important and original masters of our American landscape school . . ." noted de Kay in a 1908 Macbeth Gallery show.[45] By the closing years of the decade, Dewey was focusing, like so many of his contemporaries, on late evening, nighttime, and dawn, in which the limited range of light tested the finest Tonalists to exploit low-toned color and symbolic form as never before. *Moonlit Reverie*, circa 1908 (fig. 6.32), is a perfect example of Dewey's ability to achieve a balance of his generalized forms and the imponderable atmosphere that suffuses such a dreamscape. As de Kay's review of Dewey's 1908 Macbeth exhibition, which contained a number of recent nocturnes, pointed out, Dewey's superb craftsmanship allowed the artist to do much within the limited range of the mode. "The movement of the light and shade, the linear composition; the perfect placing of the one or two accents necessary to the scheme of the values; the concealment of the intricate arabesques made with foliage and cloud and stream and roofs of buildings; the guidance of the eye toward endless distances and roads of escape from the actuality of the visible scene, these are characteristic of a vision unwilling to content itself with representation of the immediate and unconsidered material of art, eager on the contrary to discover the fullest significance and the most delicate feeling such material can be made to yield."[46]

By 1909 the trend among American landscapists for nocturnes was so apparent that a *New York Times* writer, probably Charles de Kay, devoted an entire article to the trend. "The night pictures that recently have appeared in our own exhibitions in all instances are very different affairs from the vivid sunsets that a few years ago constituted the landscape painter's favorite theme. The mysterious and impalpable beauty of shifting shadows and veiled forms is more and more often attempted and the effort to achieve the effect of moment in the air seems to be more often successful when the subject is a night or at least an evening scene than where the representation of full daylight is the artist's air."[47] Dewey was clearly at the very epicenter of this movement, which had a long history, extending from Dwight Tryon's moonlights of the late 1880s to Ralph Albert Blakelock's and Albert Pinkham Ryder's nocturnes of the 1890s, Charles Warren Eaton's silhouetted white pines and Bruges poplars, and Ben Foster's moon-shadowed tree lines from 1900 on. (Edward Steichen, before his fame as a photographer, had already made a name for himself as a painter of nocturnes of Lake George.) Dewey's *Moonlight Nocturne, South Dartmouth, Mass.*, circa 1910 (fig. 6.33), displays the artist's extraordinary ability to elucidate a broad range of radiant greens, blues, purples, and creamy silvery whites—reminiscent of the cool colors in El Greco's work—somehow extrapolated within the muted spectrum of a moonlit landscape. Sumptuous color, sensuous textures, and a fluid balance of values executed with the bravura paint handling of John Singer Sargent give what, in lesser hands, might have been a leaden pastoral nocturne, a lift of vital and tremulous richness. That Dewey could transform the ordinary into the extraordinary, endowing the quotidian with visual drama and a complexity of spirit, prompted Charles de Kay in 1912 to say of Dewey's art that "it brings with it a profundity of thought and feeling and a perfection of science that gives it a unique place in the painting of modern times."[48] By 1916, after comparing him favorably with Inness and Blakelock, de Kay predicted: "The time will come when museums will fight for him also and put their corporate hands deep into their corporate pockets to acquire his finest works."[49] Even in 1924,

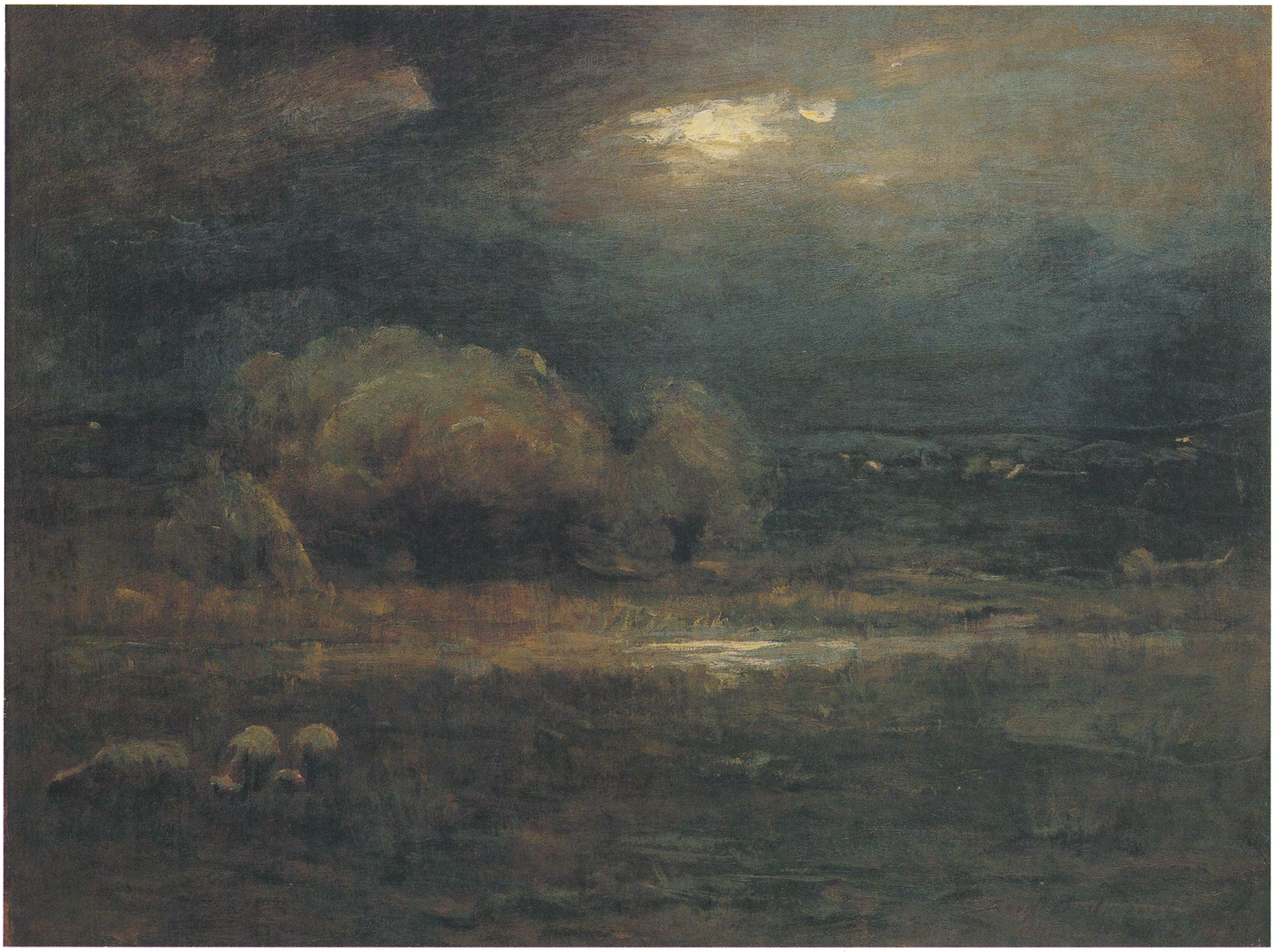


Fig. 6.33. Charles Melville Dewey, *Moonlight Nocturne, South Dartmouth, Mass.*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in. Private collection.

with the Tonalist movement well past its meridian, de Kay was defending him from "those in sympathy with the schematism of modern schools," reminding readers of the quality of Dewey's work, "the profound science and independence of the constructions."[50]

What is most remarkable about de Kay's panegyric of Dewey's work—de Kay who had promoted Robert Henri and George Bellows after 1900—is that even by 1916 the critic was reading into Dewey's conventional representations what he described as the "classical ideal" in American painting, a way of painting that in a sense was immune from modern trends—or simply transcended them—because the work embodied some underlying and enduring truth. As chapter 7 will describe in greater depth, de Kay's ideal of landscape poetics combined the subjective self-reliance of Emerson and Thoreau with classical notions, especially Stoic understandings of nature as energy, force, and vitality, along with Ovid's rendering of the protean forces of metamorphosis at the heart of nature. Nor, as chapter 7 will demonstrate, was he alone in detecting a neo-pagan streak in the art of his day, combining a stark Darwinian understanding of nature with a Virgilian mood of resignation. Crucially, in de Kay's estimation, tone was, as it had been for Inness, in a very real sense a signifier of this underlying unity, scientifically and philosophically understood.

In describing Dewey's art as "classical" de Kay was espousing Henry David Thoreau's sensibility as a poet, classicist, and natural scientist: that all times and all places and all things come together as one within the purview of the creative imagination. "Two pictures by Charles Melville Dewey are in the exhibition. The larger is called 'Landscape with Sheep' [possibly *Moonlight Nocturne, South Dartmouth, Mass.*; see fig. 6.33], and is a remarkably significant example of this artist's pursuit of a classic ideal. The word 'classic' is persistently misused and in an age of aesthetic individualism has taken on a meaning almost derogatory, hinting at the old-fashioned and the outworn. Its use in the present instance intimates a quality which of all others was dearest to the ancient Greek world, the quality, that is, of health, of normal rhythms and abundant energy, of the vital principle inhabiting a rationally and naturally developed form. None of the painters of the current exhibition [Inness, Tryon, Blakelock, Ryder] stress the abnormal, and Mr. Dewey is among those who most successfully convey the impression of wholeness in nature, of all parts working together toward a single impression, of a unity that is worlds away from simplicity, that contains multitudinous references to a still more multitudinous background of facts and experience, and yet wears the smiling face of composure and control. The aspect of this sheep picture is ingratiating. The earth hangs in that atmosphere of peace which strikes most poignantly upon the human heart accustomed to the warring of complex emotions. The large silhouette of the tree masses, the breadth of the nobly designed sky, the solidity of the earth, are elements of that sense of security in the working of eternal laws throughout the universe which the sight of wide horizons at still moments inspires. Against this background of austere peace enters the light with its delicate show song of lyric joy. It winds its way among the foliage, strays across the backs of the idle sheep, strikes the reflecting surface of a pool, and plays the part of the joy-bringing god Apollo in this cosmic drama. Under its influence all the subtleties of color in the chromatic pattern fall into order and harmony as dancers move to music. The complications of the foreground flexibly unrolled to express in sensitive modulations the gradual recession of the landscape and the perfect equilibrium between the fluent mists of distance and these sharp notes of foreground interest all speak to the observing of the highest order of technical mastery at work upon material so long studied that it has become a part of the life of the artist, lending itself to his thoughts as the most natural medium of expression."[51]

In de Kay's estimation the Tonalist heritage in America provided a counterpoint to the European experience, a nonfigurative language that was free from both narrative tradition and the specifics of social and political ideology. It was an adaptation to specifically American conditions, to a diverse and melting-pot culture, but hardly immune to the perplexities of change and raw experience. As de Kay put it, clearly implying a Darwinian interpretation of nature, Tonalism provided a "unity that is worlds away from simplicity, that contains multitudinous references to a still more multitudinous background of facts and experience. . . ." By 1916, with the most catastrophic war the world had ever known raging in Europe, the Tonalist landscape became the quiet focal point for a generation of progressive spirits who, in their youth, had known their own terrible war. For "the heart accustomed to the warring of complex emotions," a generation could take comfort in the contemplation of natural and scientific laws, "of that sense of security in the working of eternal laws throughout the universe. . . ." For the art lover, Tonalism offered a kind of spiritual consolation, a haunting mix of visually vibrant color and change in an otherwise peaceful scene of stillness and solitude. De Kay described this experience, again referring to Dewey: "The color, sensitive and exquisite, seems fairly to retreat within the general tone, to obey the command of reticence and subordination to an extent that awakens in the observer an emotion less personal than elevated and, in the strict sense of the word, mystic."[52] This sensibility, the merging of the mystic and the religious with Darwinian science in the liberal Protestant soul around the turn of the century, a sensibility embodied in Dewey and the Tonalist school, and championed by de Kay, provided the spiritual uplift for the reformist generation born between 1840 and 1865, those who entered old age during World War I and whose lives flickered out in the 1920s and 1930s.

Frederick W. Kost (1861–1923)

Frederick W. Kost is another of the forgotten stars of the Tonalist movement. Partly this was because, according to his family, Kost was a retiring individual who did not seek publicity.[53] Yet his work was collected by the astute Tonalist connoisseur Thomas B. Clarke as early as 1888; he was a member of the Society of American Artists by 1889; an academician at the National Academy of Design in 1906; and he held prestigious and respected positions on the selection and hanging committees of both the society and academy, including the famous selection committee of 1907 at the academy that precipitated Robert Henri's break from the ranks and the formation of The Eight. Kost was a founder and leading light of the Society of Landscape Painters. His prominence in American art circles was confirmed by his inclusion in the prestigious Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art in 1904, and he was often trusted with executive positions on selection committees at the Century Club. J. Francis Murphy was greatly enamored of Kost's work, as was Charles de Kay, especially the artist's oil studies, which the critic found to be "superior both in tone and color."[54] Kost did not exhibit at the National Academy after 1904 (he served on ten selection committees between 1906 and 1921), but it may have been that he had enough private patronage and gallery success to do without it. Kost painted the tidal marshlands of his early home on Staten Island until 1900, and later the stretches of bay and marshy shoreline of Long Island's Great South Bay, near his summer home in Brookhaven (purchased in 1906).[55] Kost's imagery was almost invariably of places bordering the sea or rivers—he was known for exceptional marines as well—much of it low-lying grassland or marshland with only a scattering of fully grown trees. Sea air and the soft humid atmosphere of coastal areas creates a palpable presence in his best paintings, ringing subtle and effervescent color changes across his broad expanses of low-lying earth and sky. Kost is a classic example of an artist formed and stamped by the peculiar qualities of the landscape of his youth, to which the mature artist would return time and time again.

Five paintings by Kost from the 1890s during his Staten Island years illustrate the artist's early preoccupation with a tonal envelope that breathes supersensible life into his broad reaches

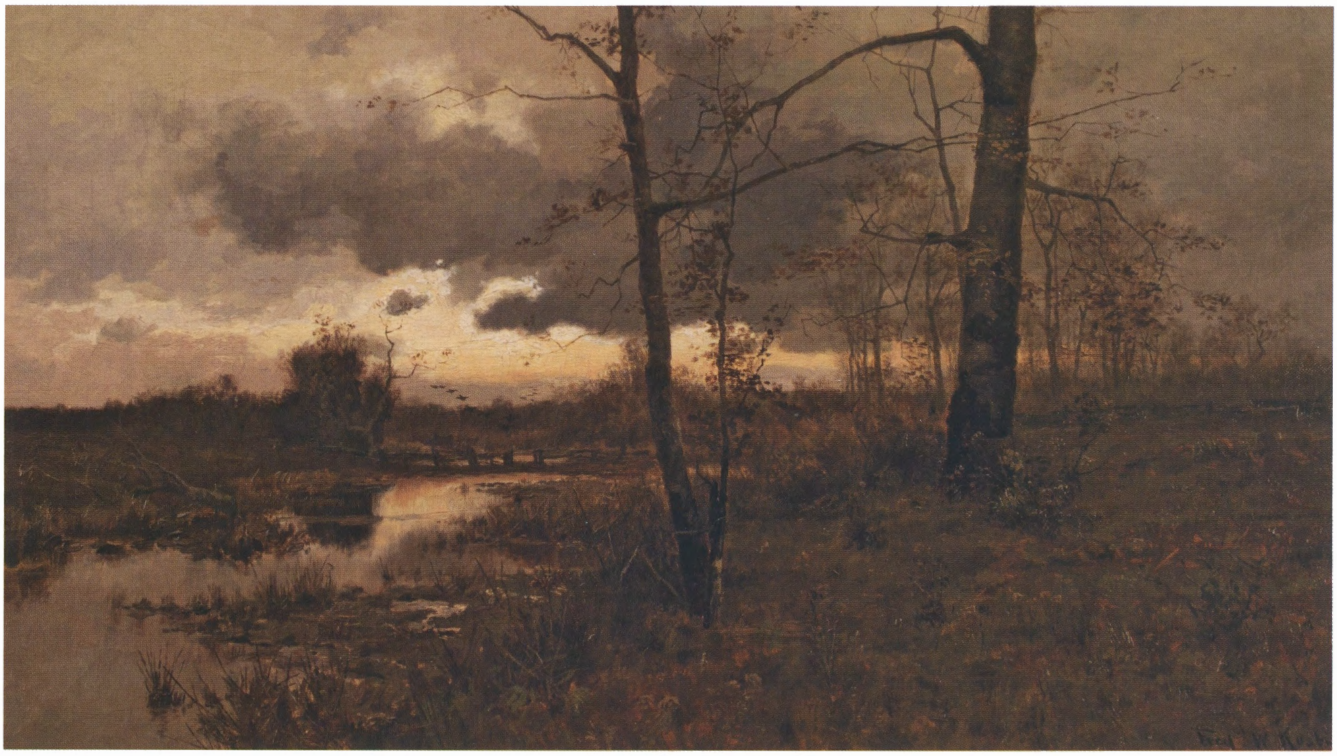


Fig. 6.34. Frederick W. Kost, *Autumn*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 13 x 24 in. Private collection.

of land and sky. *Autumn,* c. 1890 (fig. 6.34), demonstrates Kost's mature early style, after stints of study in Paris and Munich in the mid-1880s. The scene is relatively realistic and conventional in term of composition and the detailed depiction of plants, tree trunks, and a tidal stream meandering away toward the middle distance. But the all-pervasive sense of atmospheric gray that enfolds the scene, providing a rare and enchanting sensibility, subtly unifies all the elements: the near and far, the hard- and soft-edged detail, and the broadly modulated planes of color. The projection of mood is inescapable. This is a classic Tonalist landscape typical of the late 1880s to early 1890s in which the poetic impact of the whole—preached by William Morris Hunt in his *Art Talks* of 1878—is the primary goal. The place or narrative content is of secondary interest to the dramatic impact of the viewer's first impression of autumnal trees gracing the bank of a silent stream. An 1888 review of Kost's work in *The Curio* noted the great strides in the artist's development, "coming nearer and nearer to nature, reading her secrets with clearer eyes and rendering them with a more certain hand. Like all men who paint nature best he seeks in her for subjects last of all... He sees these things with clear eyes that discern in them the subtleties of color and of atmosphere that invest nature with poetry. In rendering them his touch has acquired a cunning with practice that has made its results extraordinarily interesting... Among all the young men in our art whose growth I have watched with a critical eye, I know none who have so sustained the pledge of their beginning, and few who have carried it forward so well. It is always a good sign when a young painter's art has a suggestion of size entirely independent of the area of his canvas."[56]

Staten Island Sunset, 1891 (fig. 6.35), demonstrates the way in which Kost's early straightforward approach to subject matter has been modified under both the impact of Whistlerian decorative modes and Impressionist-style facture, producing a more schematic and graphic approach to composition. The almost severe pinkish-green tone and stark simplification allow the artist to indulge in compelling horizontal patterns of near-identical tonalities, pulling out local colors, especially the most vivid greens, from the broader planes of refracted, throbbing sunset pink. This otherworldly effect is both romantic and decorative, fitting the growing aesthetic sensibility of the era. Even the inclusion of a figure in the middle ground and ducks in the foreground does not diminish the purity of design or distract from the bravura freedom of broadly brushed pigment. The searing pink reflection of the sunset in the foreground stream is so intense and radiant as to seemingly detach the landmasses from all foundation, imparting a near surreal effect in which the earth floats in an infinite sky.

The Footbridge, circa 1895 (fig. 6.36), wonderfully displays Kost's ability to play a variation on a theme, primarily by engaging a predominant tonality, in this case milky greens, to unify and give emotional resonance to an otherwise unexceptional landscape. The soft, luminous atmosphere produced by the subtle merging of broad passages of green allows for a radical simplification and structuring of various elements into broad geometric patterns. Only the details of a

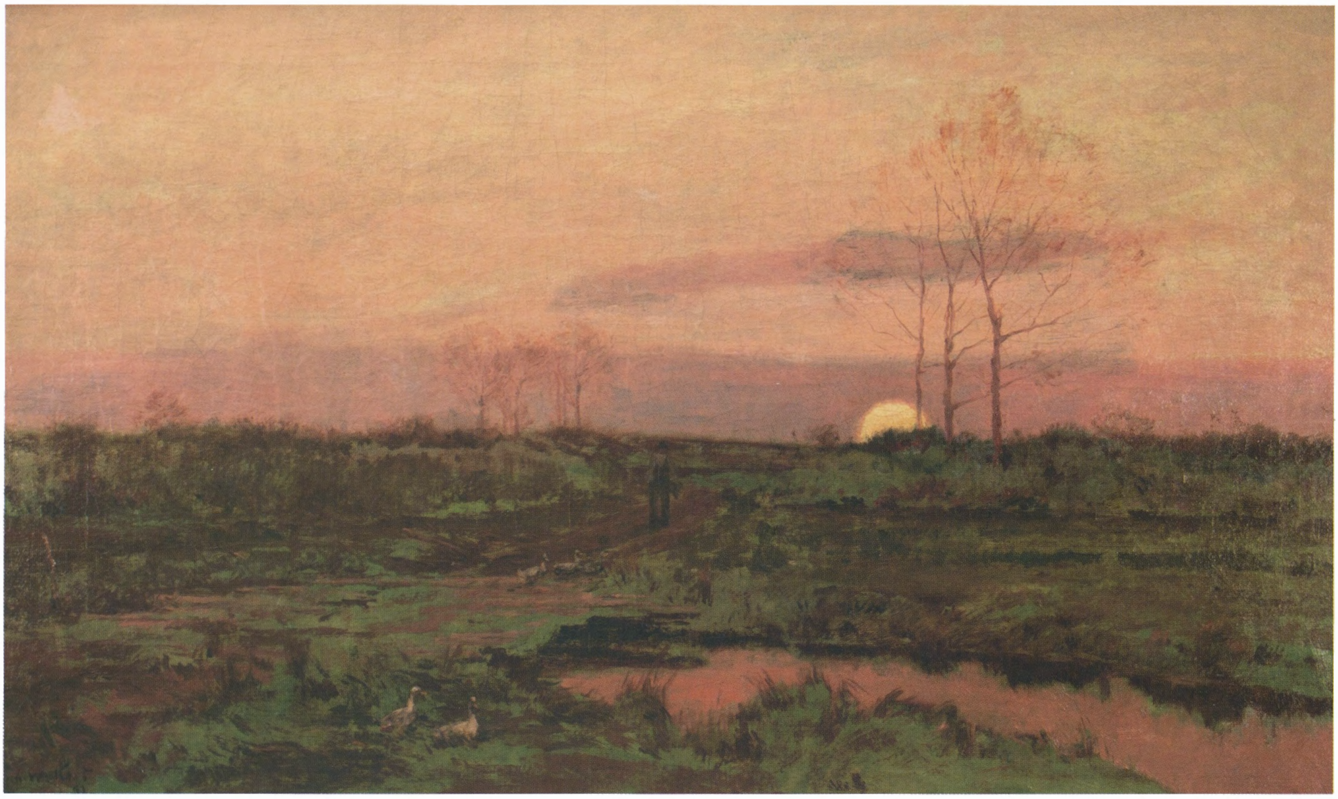


Fig. 6.35. Frederick W. Kost, *Staten Island Sunset*, 1891. Oil on canvas, 18 x 30 in. Private collection.

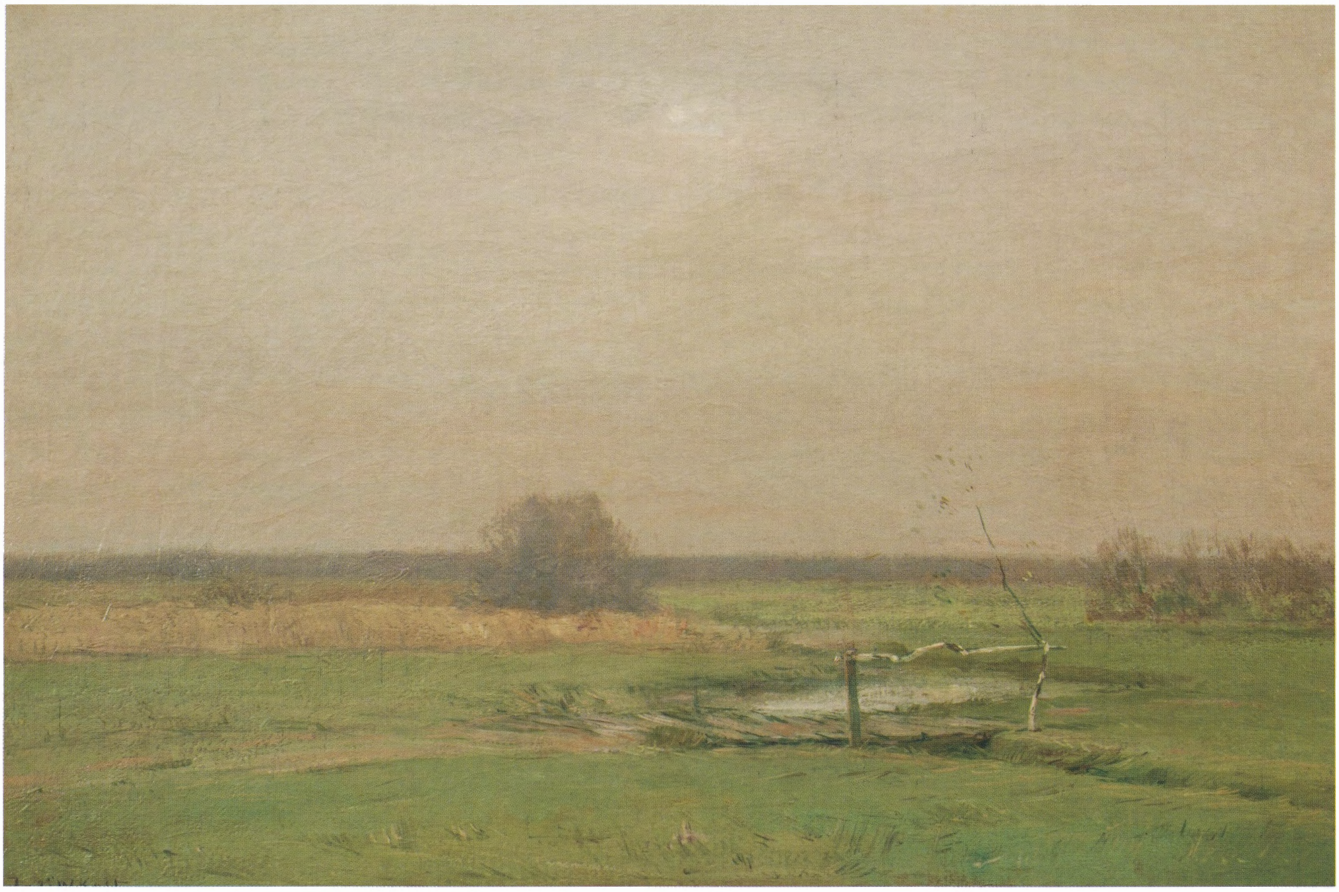


Fig. 6.36. Frederick W. Kost, *The Footbridge*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Private collection.

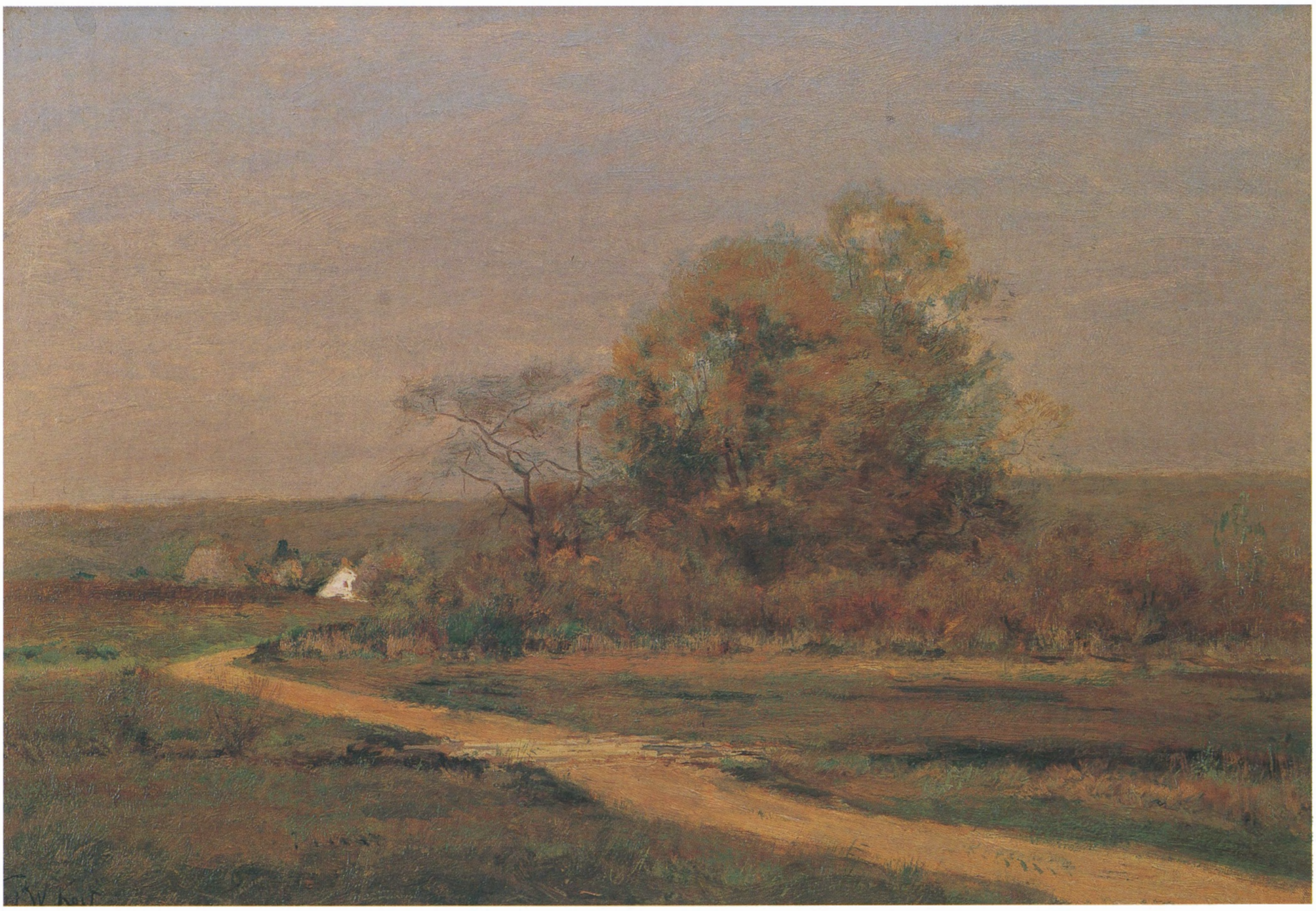


Fig. 6.37. Frederick W. Kost, *The Road to the Beach, Southfield, Staten Island,* 1890. Oil on canvas, 15 x 22 in. Private collection.

birch sapling and the handrail of the footbridge offer the eye a point of realistic detail, anchoring the composition's sensuous otherworldly diffuseness. The feel for underlying symmetries in the land and the subtle balancing of the elements result in a quietest equanimity, an expression of almost mystic rapture. A more straightforward, though no less subtle rendition of home ground and Kost's forty-year residence on his "beloved" Staten Island is the artist's *The Road to the Beach, Southfield, Staten Island*, 1890 (fig. 6.37). Here a sumptuous stand of old trees in the middle ground serves as the primary focus. In this period, on Staten Island and up and down the Eastern seaboard, the old forests had been largely cut down for timber, so the remaining woodlots and individual trees were greatly prized, both as nostalgic remnants of the past and as graceful subjects against backgrounds of open pastures and distant skies. In time, Kost would make something of a specialty of tree forms, individually and in groups.

Autumn, Staten Island, circa 1900 (fig. 6.38), indicates the growing expressive quality of Kost's landscapes around the time he left his family home of Staten Island for his summer haunt of Brookhaven. Like so many of his colleagues after 1900, Kost gives less emphasis, at least in blatant design and patterning, on Whistlerian and Aesthetic-movement compositional modes, and concentrates on more expressive uses of paint and symbolic form. The tradeoff resulted in a probing of inner states, spiritual sentiment, and individuality in the display of gestural paint handling. By 1900, Kost was a leader in the newly formed Society of Landscape Painters and was coming into his own, epitomizing what de Kay singled out in the second exhibition of the Society of Landscape Painters as an originality that was not derived from European schools of academic art or Impressionism. *Autumn, Staten Island,*

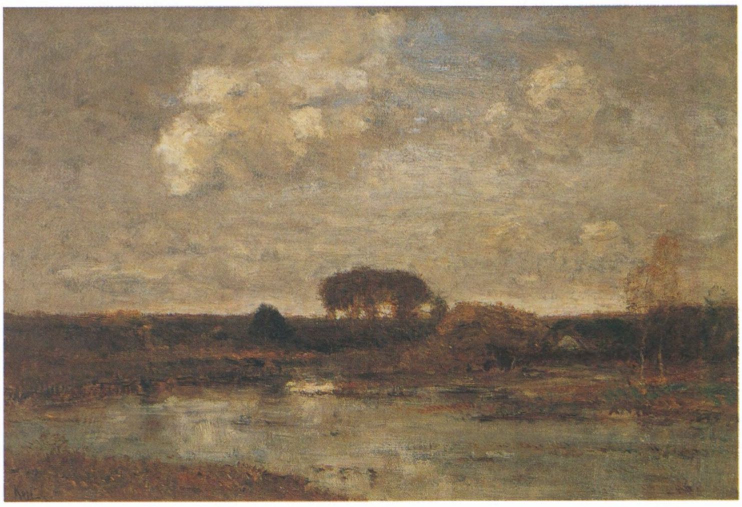


Fig. 6.38. Frederick W. Kost, *Autumn, Staten Island*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 16 x 24 in. Private collection.

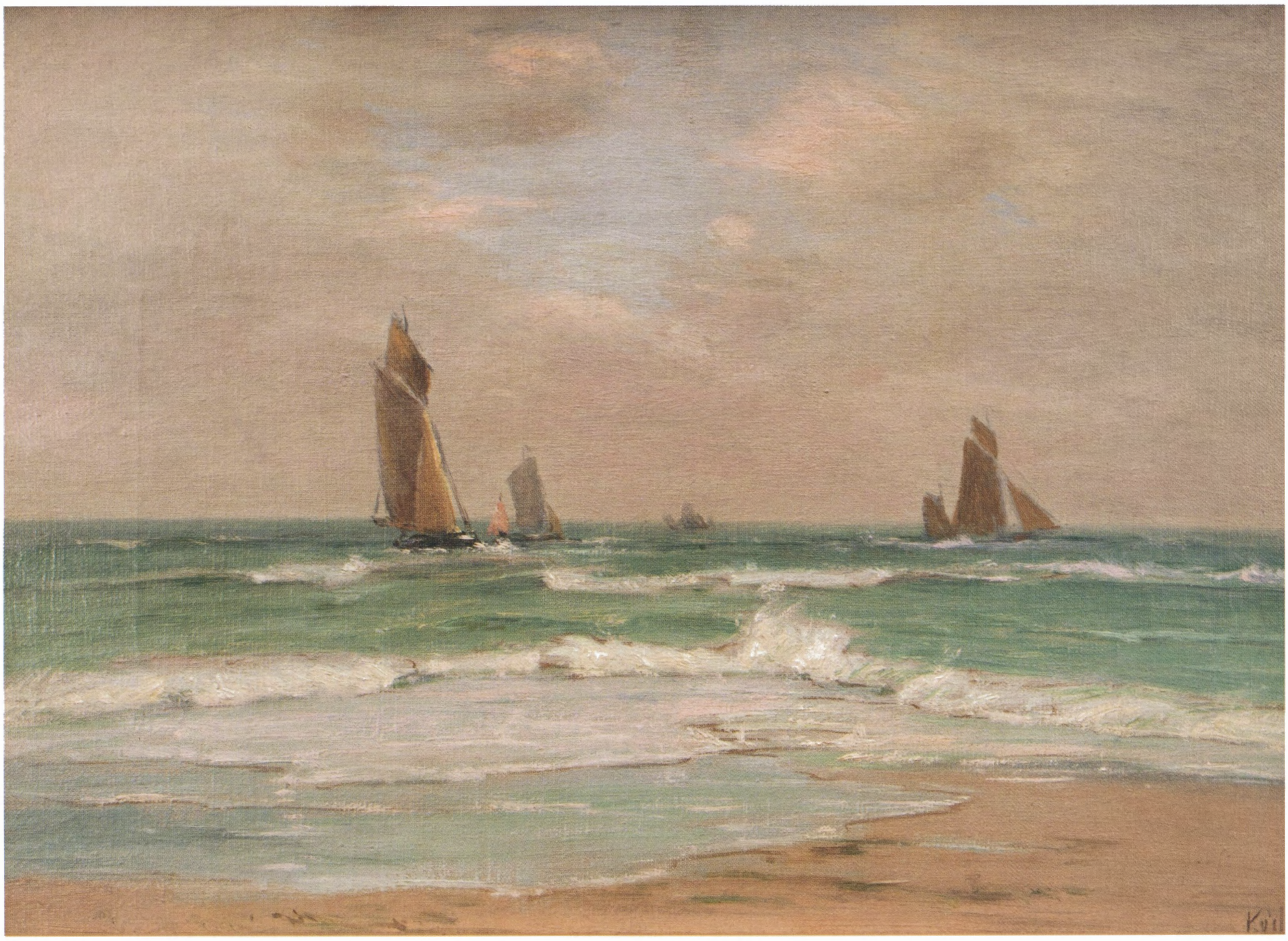


Fig. 6.39. Frederick W. Kost, *Beach Breeze*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

reminiscent of the late expressive canvases of Kost's friend and admirer, J. Francis Murphy, is unlike anything that might be found in Europe of the day. The title, *Autumn*, defines the work: a landscape less about a specific place—though it is a known location of the artist, and more about the mood of the season expressed through the artist's imagination (and in this case, possibly sadness at the closing of a chapter in the artist's life, when his father moved west in 1900 and the son left Staten Island permanently). Traditional recession is abrogated by the flattening of forms and added emphasis on the surface quality of the pigment. The various recessional planes seem to hover and coruscate on the forward plane of the canvas rather than move into distance. The two-dimensional tree forms against the horizon have a strong symbolic motive, and the landscape features are further emphasized by the tonality of the whole, which makes for a more graphic read of individual elements. Unlike Murphy, a fellow member of the Society of Landscape Painters, who was a conceptualist at heart, Kost seemed to maintain a firm perceptualist stance to real places, yet he was clearly intent on manipulating his scenes to project emotion. By 1900, Kost was already considered one of the most accomplished artists of the younger generation, as attested to in his catalogue entry for the Evans sale of 1900: "Among the comparatively younger men in the American school of landscape painters none occupies a more prominent place than Frederick W. Kost, whose achievements entitle him to high rank as an artist and whose work each year affords additional proof of the soundness of his methods and the fine quality of his temperament."[57]

Samuel Isham, in his *History of American Painting* of 1905, classified Kost as a marine painter of solid technique and delicacy of tone. *Beach Breeze*, circa 1900 (fig. 6.39), provides an exquisite example of Kost's ability to capture the exhilarating freshness and hypnotic patterns of breaking waves on a secluded beach as the wind brings sea and sky to life. Kost's feeling for the textures of waves, the translucence of sunlight playing over and through water, and the traceries of foamy spray caressing the edge of shallow breakers is that of someone who has spent his life near the enchantments of the sea.

In 1900, Kost left Staten Island and moved to Long Island—though he maintained a studio residence in the city—eventually settling in Brookhaven with his sister. Kost's choice of Brookhaven, with its water-saturated air, scattering of old trees, and easy access to the Great South Bay, was obviously

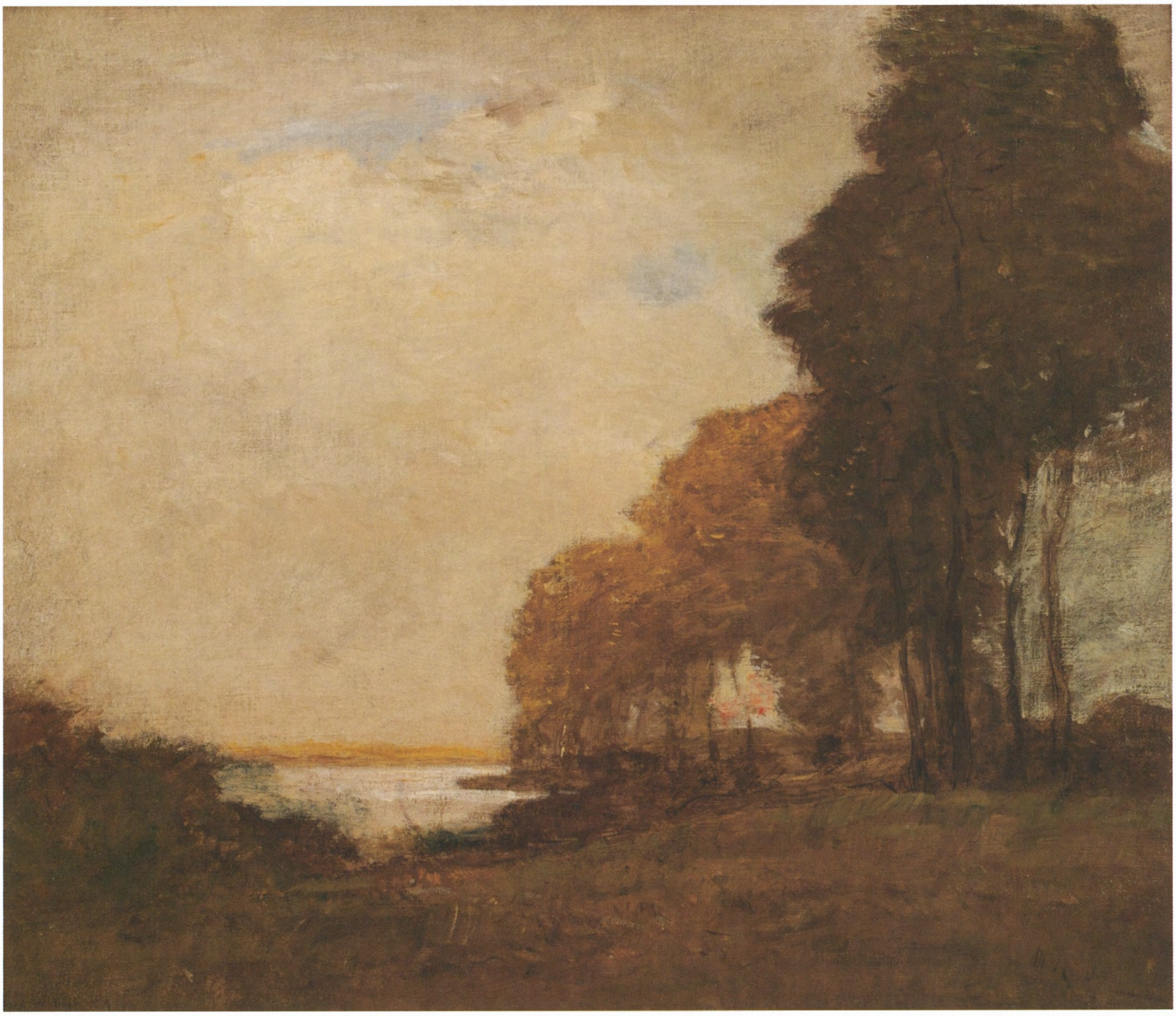


Fig. 6.40. Frederick W. Kost, *On the South Shore, Long Island*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 24 x 28 in. Private collection.

prompted by his forty years on Staten Island in similar surrounds. Possibly the artist Walter Clark, a fellow member of the Society of Landscape Painters, who had taken a home in Brookhaven in 1891, might have encouraged Kost's resettlement. From 1900 on, Kost's work moved increasingly in an abstract and expressive direction, gaining power and emotional force that put the artist on the cusp of modernism, with medals at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900, Buffalo in 1901, and St. Louis in 1904. A *New York Times* review (probably by Charles de Kay) of a 1903 exhibition at the American Art Galleries, including ten works by Kost, noted the recent advances made by the artist: "... by comparison with the earlier work here to be seen they show what an extraordinary change for the better has taken place in his case, how much truer, more robust, and individual his present style is than it used to be, although that earlier work, chiefly dealing with views of the salt meadows of Staten Island, did not lack merit and often had particular charm."[58] *On the South Shore, Long Island*, circa 1910 (fig. 6.40), displays Kost's mature style of broadly brushed simple masses and "more robust" facture, and his love for silhouetted tree forms, which verge on a personal symbology. The entire surface of the canvas swirls with energy and a sense of movement, whether a breeze off the sea animating the clouds, or the sheer exhilaration of the artist in his creation. The muted tonality adds to the weight and majesty of the land forms and the gorgeous calligraphy of choreographed shapes against the distant sky. Eyelets of light transform the interstices between the trunks into sinuous lozenges of activated paint, while the coruscation of reflected glitter on the sea gains both emotional and pictorial force.

Another example of Kost's Expressive Tonalism is *Sea Breeze*, circa 1910 (fig. 6.41). Although the work has a wonderful picturesque quality, it is the sensation of sea air saturating and sculpting the landforms that energizes and unifies it. The

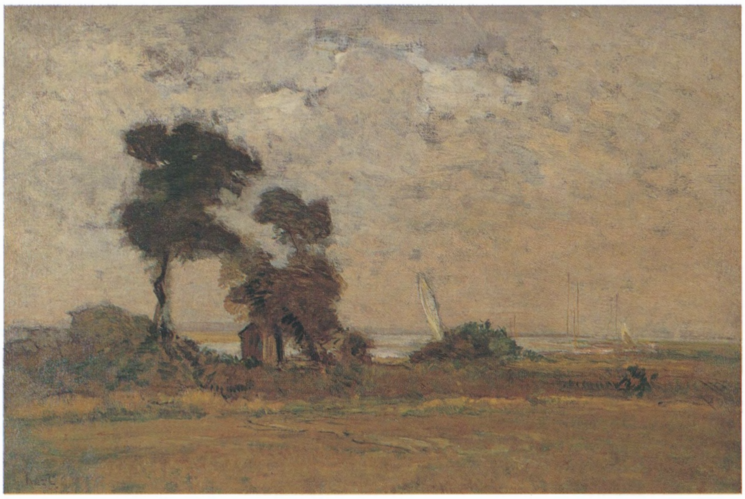


Fig. 6.41. Frederick W. Kost, *Sea Breeze*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 14 x 24 in. Private collection.

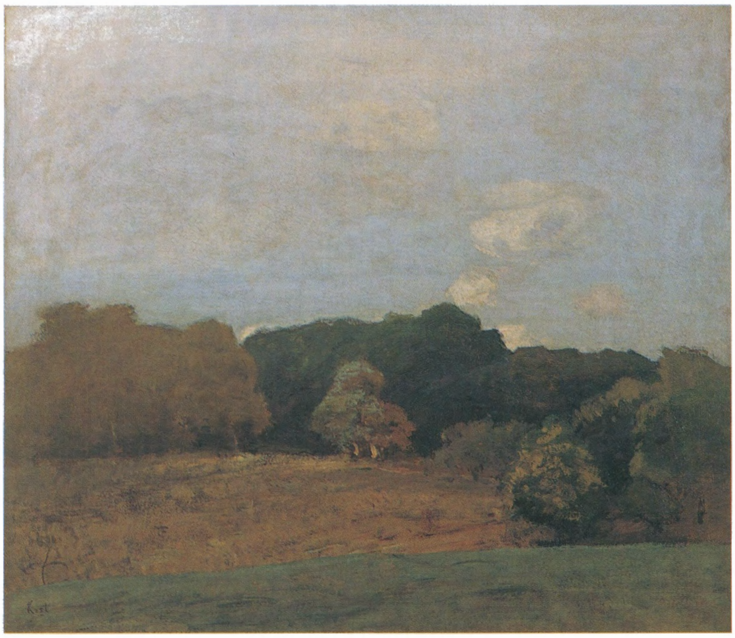


Fig. 6.42. Frederick W. Kost, *Summer Tree Line*, c. 1915. Oil on canvas, 24 x 28 in. Private collection.

paint surfaces scintillate with ductile motion and the artist has employed color tones that do double duty, both to suggest recession and draw attention to their two-dimensional surface. The haunting movement of the middle-ground trees, strangely like a time-exposed photograph that records motion over a number of seconds, expresses an intriguing metamorphic power that increasingly fills the smaller oil sketches of Kost's maturity. Kost was a photographer and a juror of photography exhibitions, and so was well acquainted with the shadowy, sometimes ghostly renditions of things in nature in long-exposure photography. The artist's sumptuous vibrant surface tonalities and bravura paint handling creates an expression of felt life that transforms the everyday into a ringing exemplar of an emotional state translated into paint.

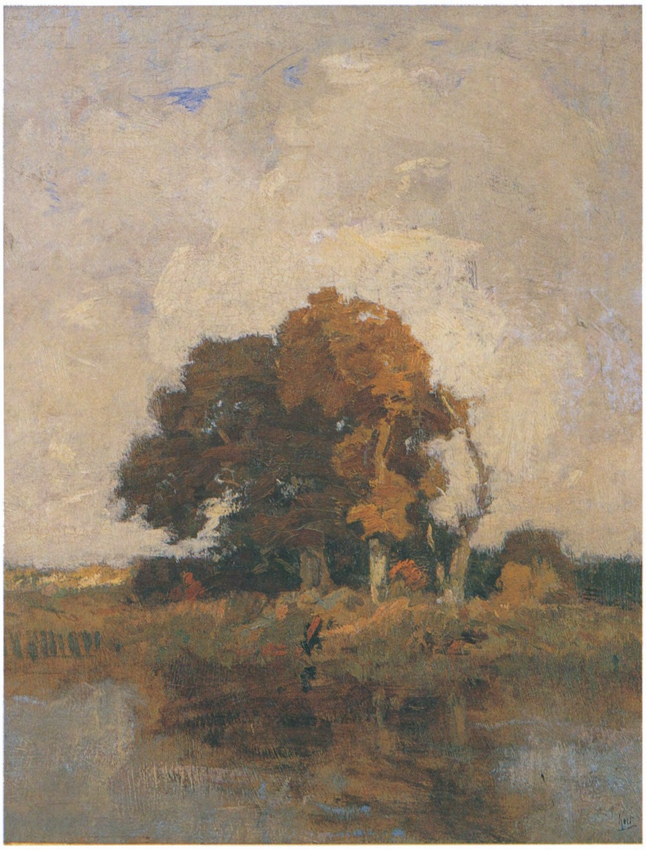


Fig. 6.43. Frederick W. Kost, *Tree Reflections*, c. 1915. Oil on panel, 14 x 11 in. Private collection.

Summer Tree Line, circa 1915 (fig. 6.42), displays the momentum of Kost's art toward greater abstraction, expression, and simplification. Here the land, tree, and sky masses have become more generalized, fused into more basic units, which read almost as flat planes stacked on the canvas face. Detail is almost nonexistent except for the highlight on a tree trunk and a vestigial tree or plant form in the lower left corner, which has been schematized to look almost like a monogram. Broad areas of summer color, with only subtle variations of like tones to give the scene a feeling of simmering vibration, contain the carrying power of the image. This simplification of means and ends would allow *Summer Tree Line* to pass as a contemporary work, closer to the paintings of a postmodern Tonalist like Wolf Kahn.

Kost's smaller works, intimate oil sketches, which he seems to have enjoyed creating in abundance, were especially admired by Charles de Kay. *Tree Reflections*, circa 1915 (fig. 6.43), displays a gestural ease and suppleness of paint handling combined with an extraordinary feel for the modulating layers of atmosphere produced by late afternoon sunlight and the scrim of reflected cloud-light rising from the foreground water. Kost's approximation of soft-edged forms seen through transformative atmosphere is no longer a transcription of natural effects, per se, but a rationale for the artist's free paint handling, which displays an exuberance and dexterity verging

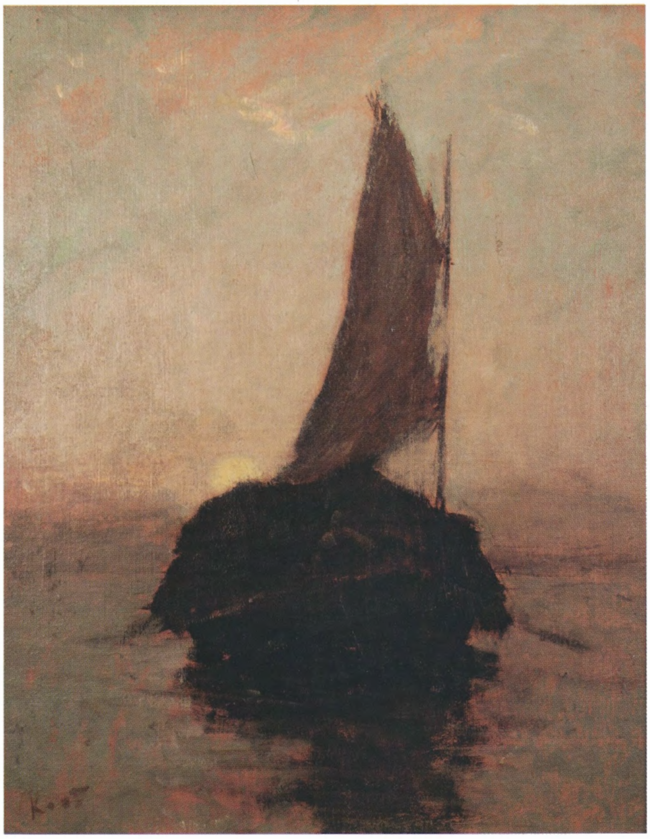


Fig. 6.44. Frederick W. Kost, *Hayboat at Sunset*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in. Private collection.

on abstract symbolization. The negative spaces, the interstices between branches, the reflections in the water overlaid with glinting sunlight have become excuses for the gestural movement of paint over panel, intimating the correspondence between the unseen forces inherent in nature and man's imaginative handiwork: a display of surface beauty, of texture and tone that, by holding time in abeyance, creates an epiphany in which the moment remains ever fresh. As John Fiske, the nineteenth-century writer, Harvard University-based lecturer, and popularizer of Darwin and Spencer, might put it in his cosmic philosophy (see chapter 7), Kost has managed to animate both the *process* and *things* found in nature through the looking glass of his creative imagination. He has made visible states of consciousness that exist outside the mundane reality of everyday life.

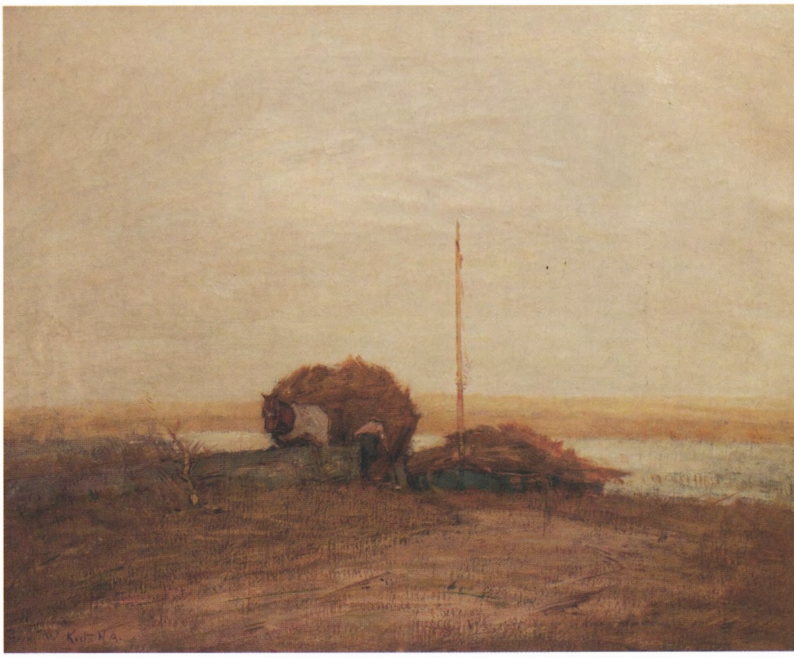


Fig. 6.45. Frederick W. Kost, *The Hay Boat, Brookhaven Dock*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

Kost was not immune to the more picturesque life of his neighborhood in Brookhaven, especially the harvesting of salt hay that grows in the marshes bordering the ocean bays on Long Island's south coast. Salt hay was used to supplement the feed for livestock and also as mulch and packing material. *Hayboat at Sunset*, circa 1910 (fig. 6.44), allows Kost both a nostalgic and romantic rendition of a way of life, probably on the decline even in his lifetime, with a luxuriously languid depiction of abstract shapes silhouetted against an activated scrim of sunset pinks, lemony yellows, and Delft blues. *Hayboat at Sunset*, for all its picturesque charm, exudes an indescribable silence, rhythmic buoyancy, and supersaturated equipoise of positive and negative space. The luffing sail, reminiscent in shape and fiery outline—an intriguingly negative and positive form—of the tattered sails of Albert Pinkham Ryder's pitching ships on moonlit seas, was probably an homage on some level to an artist who was avidly sought out by collectors during these years. Kost's work, however, conveys less of mystic wandering and more of a mystic rapture in time-honored labor, an expression in paint of the tedium and joy, the slow steady work, of the rower on the last leg of his homeward journey. This journey's end is pictured in another painting by Kost, *The Hay Boat, Brookhaven Dock*, circa 1910 (fig. 6.45). A poignant and strange obituary notice written by Kost himself into the National Academy of Design minutes gives a picture of a sad ending to the artist's career, and the blighting of his nostalgic memories of a German-American childhood on Staten Island: "With the break out of the World War a dark cloud began to gather about him, his racial feeling was intense, and he suffered. When 1917 came that cloud thickened until he fairly disappeared in it, withdrawing himself utterly and closing his lips tightly upon the bitterness within. To so kindly and direct and affectionate a nature it was a tragedy and we fully believe that the Soul of the man was never for a moment disloyal to the Art ideals and principles of his beloved Academy."[59] When Kost died in 1923 at his Brookhaven home, he had only his sister, a few neighbors, and old acquaintances from Staten Island to keep his memory alive. Except for a small Brooklyn Museum retrospective in 1948 organized by his sister and friends, the retiring Kost was soon lost to memory.

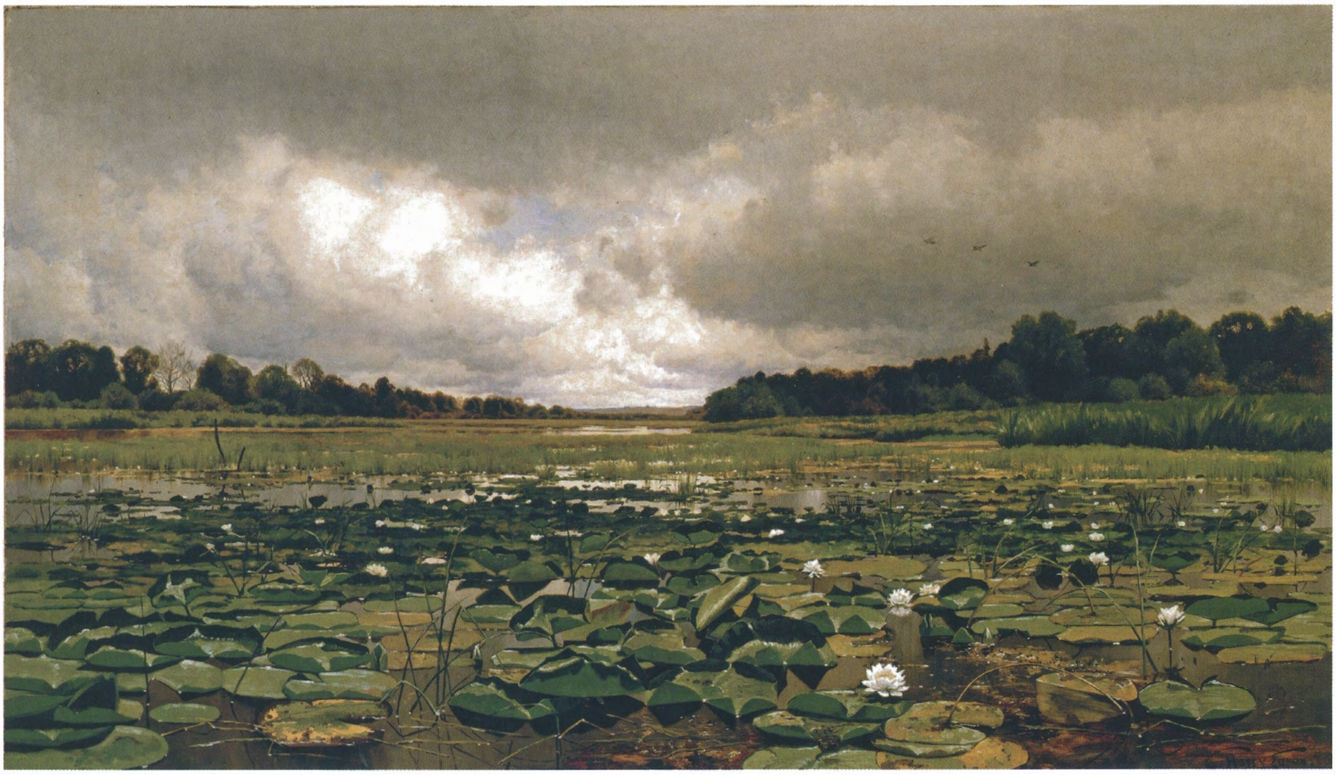


Fig. 6.46. Charles Harry Eaton, *The Lily Pond*, c. 1886. Oil on canvas, 40 x 70 in. Detroit Museum of Art Purchase, Popular Subscription Fund (89.1), Detroit Institute of Arts.

Charles Harry Eaton (1850–1901)

Charles Harry Eaton—whose important contribution to the watercolor medium was noted in chapter 5—sometimes known as "Harry" Eaton to differentiate him from Charles Warren Eaton (a distant relation), is a sterling example of an American original, yet he is one more case of an important Tonalist artist lost to art history. Born in Ohio and largely self-taught, Harry Eaton began his career in Chicago art circles as a Hudson River–style painter and illustrator. He settled in New York by 1882 and exhibited at the National Academy of Design from 1881 until 1900, when in 1901 his life was tragically ended by a heart attack.[60] His sudden death at the height of his powers possibly explains how Harry Eaton all but vanished from art history—with only the scattered remainder of his sumptuous landscapes and watercolors a tantalizing clue to an exceptional career cut short. His masterpiece, *The Lily Pond*, circa 1886 (fig. 6.46), has dazzled viewers for generations with its powerful combination of carefully delineated lily pads and delicate flowers filling the foreground, and dramatic recession into space, where the landscape forms become increasingly diffuse with hazy soft edges and a dreamy floating beauty. The whole composition gains a powerful emotional unity by the sumptuous atmospheric envelope created by slight variations in tone, texture, and paint handling. Harry Eaton's early style, somewhat akin to that of fellow Chicagoan J. Francis Murphy in the 1880s, manages to harmonize a detailed, concrete rendering of nature, derived from the late Hudson River School and provincial art sources (Eaton illustrated books by Theodore Roosevelt, among others), with an appreciation for atmospheric quality influenced by Barbizon landscapes and the examples of work by the young Americans recently returned from Europe. The sultry, low-toned poetics of Inness, Wyant, and J. Francis Murphy clearly had an influence. *Summer Days*, circa 1885 (fig. 6.47), displays Harry Eaton's early adoption of

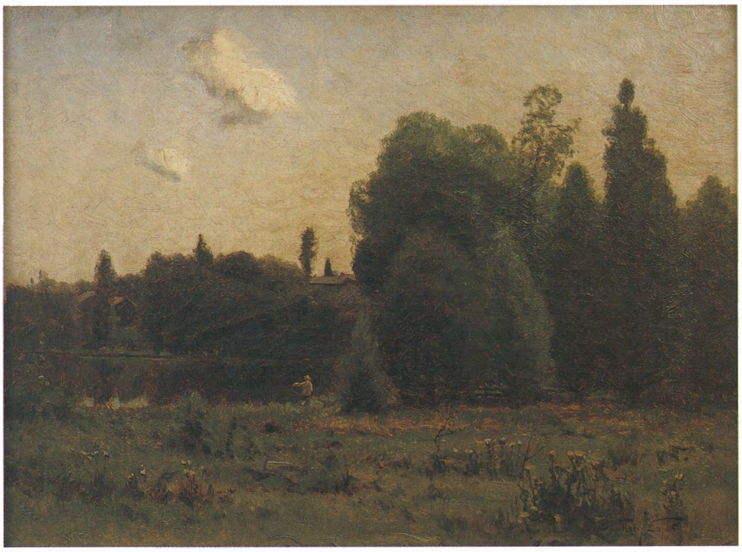


Fig. 6.47. Charles Harry Eaton, *Summer Days*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

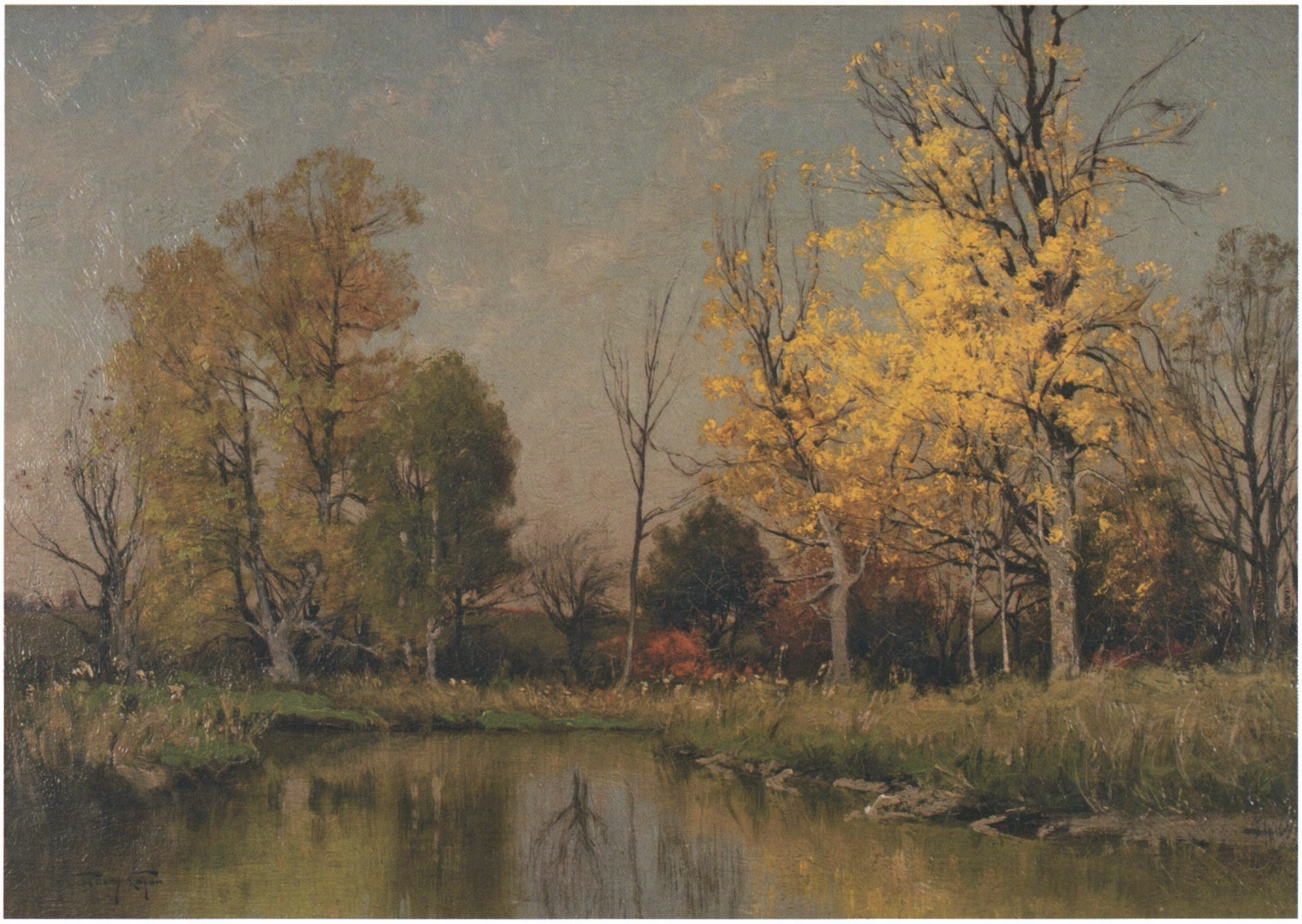


Fig. 6.48. Charles Harry Eaton, *Early Spring*, c. 1885. Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

the decorative format of Aesthetic Tonalism as it was emerging in the early 1880s in New York, especially in the circles of the Art Students League and the Society of American Artists. The bucolic vernacular and the sophisticated decorative abstraction of the Aesthetic movement create a sense of suspended time. The tree forms are arranged in deft patterns that attain a soothing rhythm of form, which first attracts and then transfixes the eye. The overall vibration of tone is enhanced by the subtly embedded compositional patterns, also found in the works of Leonard Ochtman and Charles Warren Eaton from around the same time. Like them, following George Inness's lead, the foreground meadow flowers, by which many Americans lovingly measured the advance of the seasons, are delicately delineated as to be easily identifiable. *Early Spring*, circa 1885 (fig. 6.48), is another early and intimate Eaton landscape that manages, with meticulous design, to merge the brittle naturalism and grace of an ensemble of fledgling bankside trees with a prevailing atmospheric envelope—a quality achieved by carefully modulated tonalities throughout.

By 1886, in *Summer Meadow* (fig. 6.49), Harry Eaton has broadened his paint handling; his facture is thicker and juicier in the application of color and much finicky detail has been abandoned. His foregrounds also rise more dramatically to dominate the viewer's space, creating a fuller sense of enclosure and intimacy of place. Tonalism's signature notes of meadow flowers loom into the canvas plane with a lithe, windblown choreography that almost invites the viewer's touch. An uncanny sense of mysterious movment is everwhere apparent. *Autumn after Rain*, 1888 (fig. 6.50), shows a further advancement of Eaton's indulgence of soft-edged form, as the pearly gray atmosphere and heavy damp that permeates the scene, especially in the middle plane, creates blurred outlines and moody amorphous shapes amid the tree line, in turn adding to the feeling of mysterious beauty—and nature as a master shape-shifter. The tangle of fallen tree trunks in the foreground and the scrappy tree rising from the far bank offer points of sinuous detail verging on natural symbolism.

By the late 1880s, Eaton was coming fully into his mature and masterful style, most fully expressed in *The Lily Pond*. He won a silver medal at the Boston Institute in 1887 and a gold the following year, and another gold medal at the American Art Association in 1888. In 1889 his painting *A Normandy Landscape*, 1885 (fig. 6.51), which entered the collection of William T. Evans by 1890, was exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle, and later at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, and again at the Lotos Club in 1895. A *Normandy Landscape*

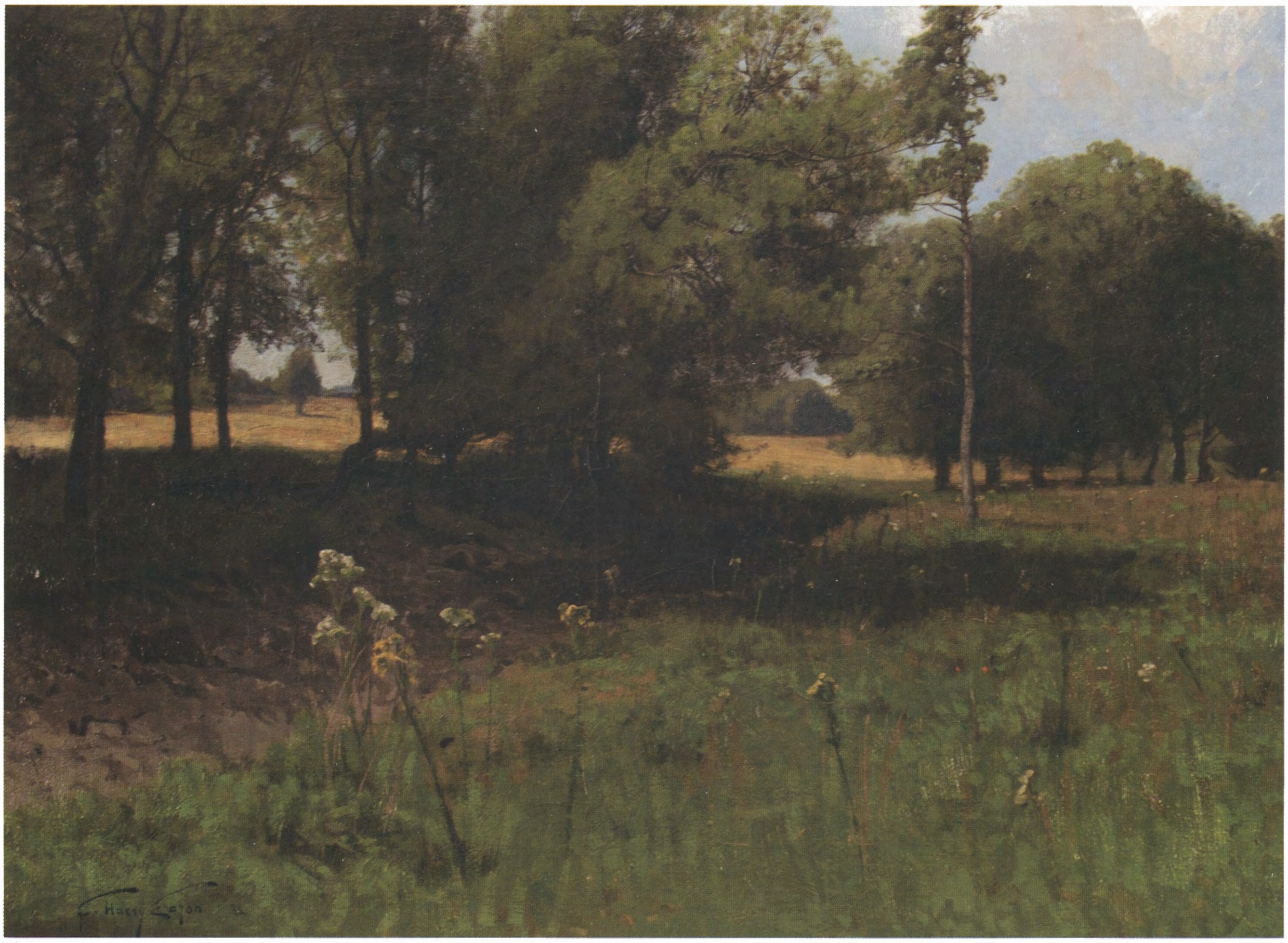


Fig. 6.49. Charles Harry Eaton, *Summer Meadow*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

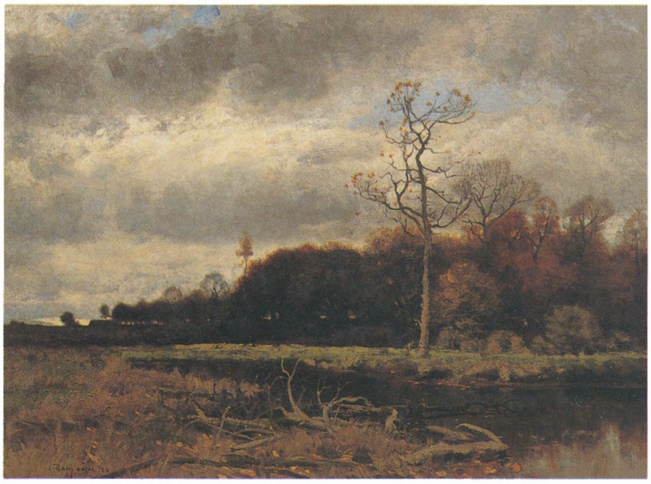


Fig. 6.50. Charles Harry Eaton, *Autumn after Rain*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Private collection.

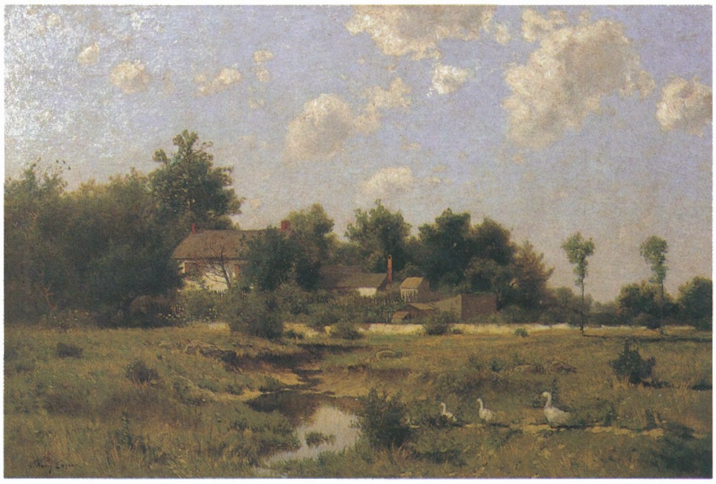


Fig. 6.51. Charles Harry Eaton, *A Normandy Landscape*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Private collection.

retains much of the sunny disposition of Harry Eaton's early landscapes, combining the sympathetic detail dear to lovers of the picturesque, with sumptuous, soft-edged forms to create a scene both realistic yet utterly synthetic in the arrangement of landforms. Eaton's bucolic charm has as much to do with the beauty of rural Normandy—perhaps the painter's first exposure to European landscape and light—as it does with his deft deployment of cool adjacent tones and the intricately constructed patterns that stitch together the composition with uncanny craftsmanship, right down to the three white geese, echoing points of white that serve as counterpoint to the recessional diagonals flowing throughout the foreground.

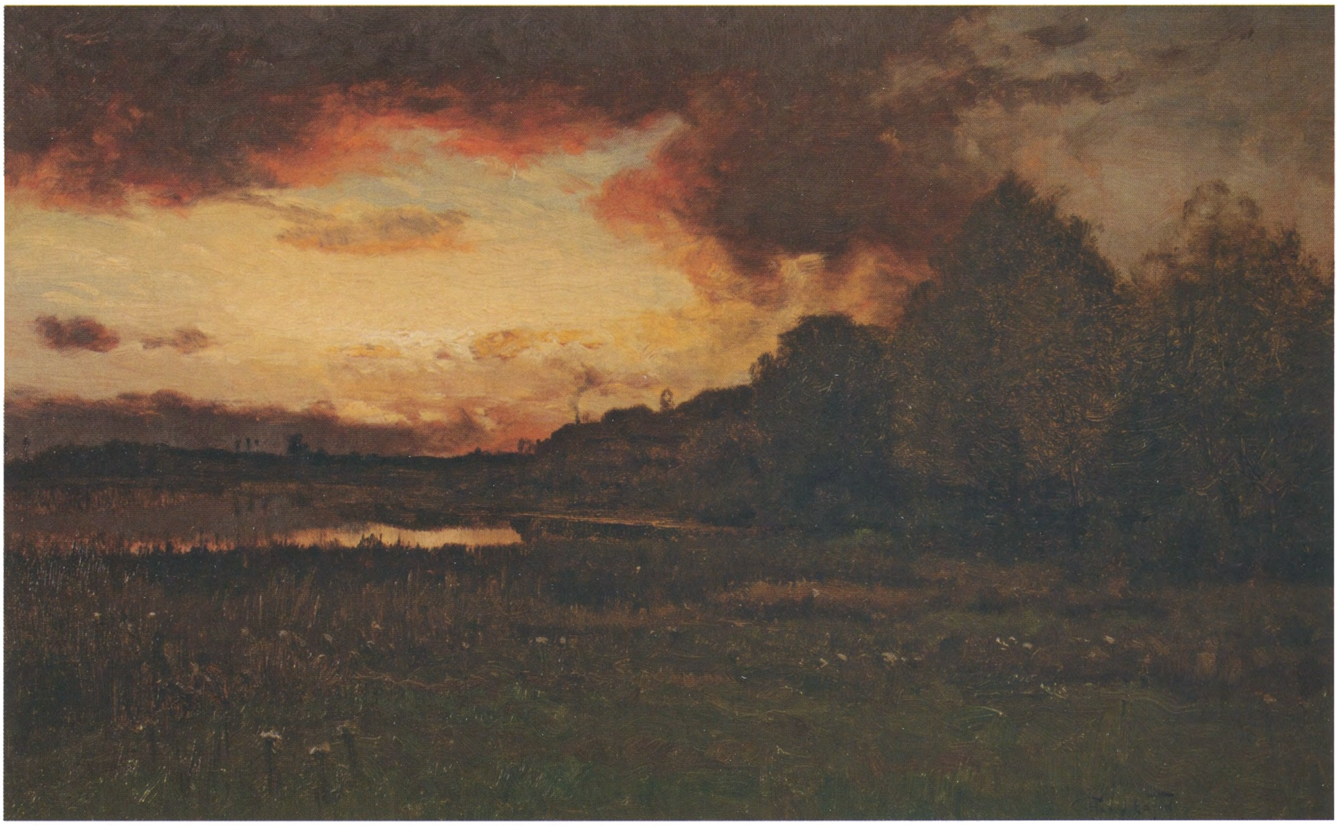


Fig. 6.52. Charles Harry Eaton, *Sunset after a Storm*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 10 x 16 in. Private collection.

By the 1890s, Harry Eaton's reputation was fully established, especially in watercolor circles.[61] Eaton was a juror on the watercolor committee for the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, winning the Evans Prize in 1898 at the American Watercolor Society, and a prize in 1900 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts for watercolor; in addition he served on the hanging committee of the National Academy of Design in 1899 and was secretary of the American Watercolor Society at the time of his death in 1901. *Sunset after a Storm*, circa 1890 (fig. 6.52), displays Eaton's ability to move to a more low-toned mode and the depiction of damp, cloud-saturated atmospheric light, something Inness was making a specialty of at about this same time. For an artist like Charles Harry Eaton, emerging out of the Hudson River tradition with its emphasis on midday sunlight and pleasant skies, his transition to more overcast weather, and with it a more brooding, expressive quality, marks a significant change, a change in temperament and palette that Eaton seems to have easily assimilated. His paint handling, too, is freer, more sensuous, combining soft-edged forms with only the barest hints of details. *Autumn Brook*, circa 1898 (fig. 6.53), displays the growing breadth and scope of Eaton's late style in oils. The artist's brushstrokes have become energized, perhaps influenced by Impressionist facture, but are more gestural than chromatic, blended on the canvas surface to create blurred, rushing edges on the forms, and in turn setting up an uneasy sensation of movement throughout the composition. Instead of merely portraying the look of fall, the artist is approximating in paint handling the season's ethereal metamorphosis and sere starkness.

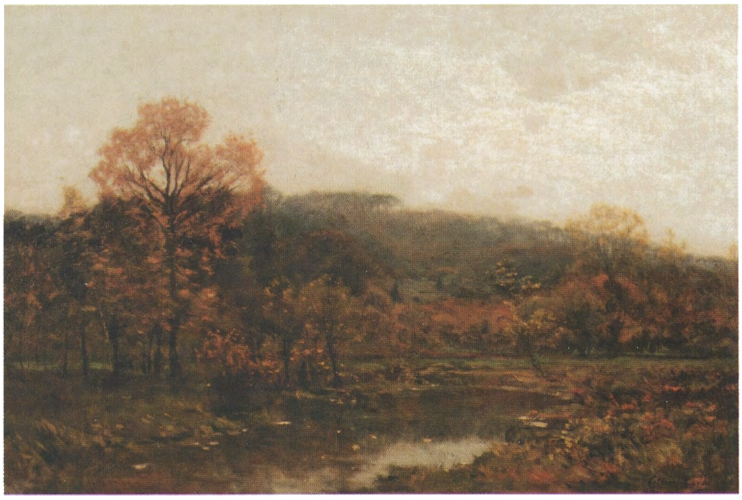


Fig. 6.53. Charles Harry Eaton, *Autumn Brook*, c. 1898. Oil on canvas, 33½ x 46 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

Eaton's development along these lines was true to the Expressive Tonalism of so many of his colleagues around 1900. *Summer Wind*, circa 1899 (fig. 6.54), follows in a similarly subjective mood. All the elements of the composition have been simplified; the tonal scheme of soft greens and blues are kept within a narrow range so that the forms read with greater

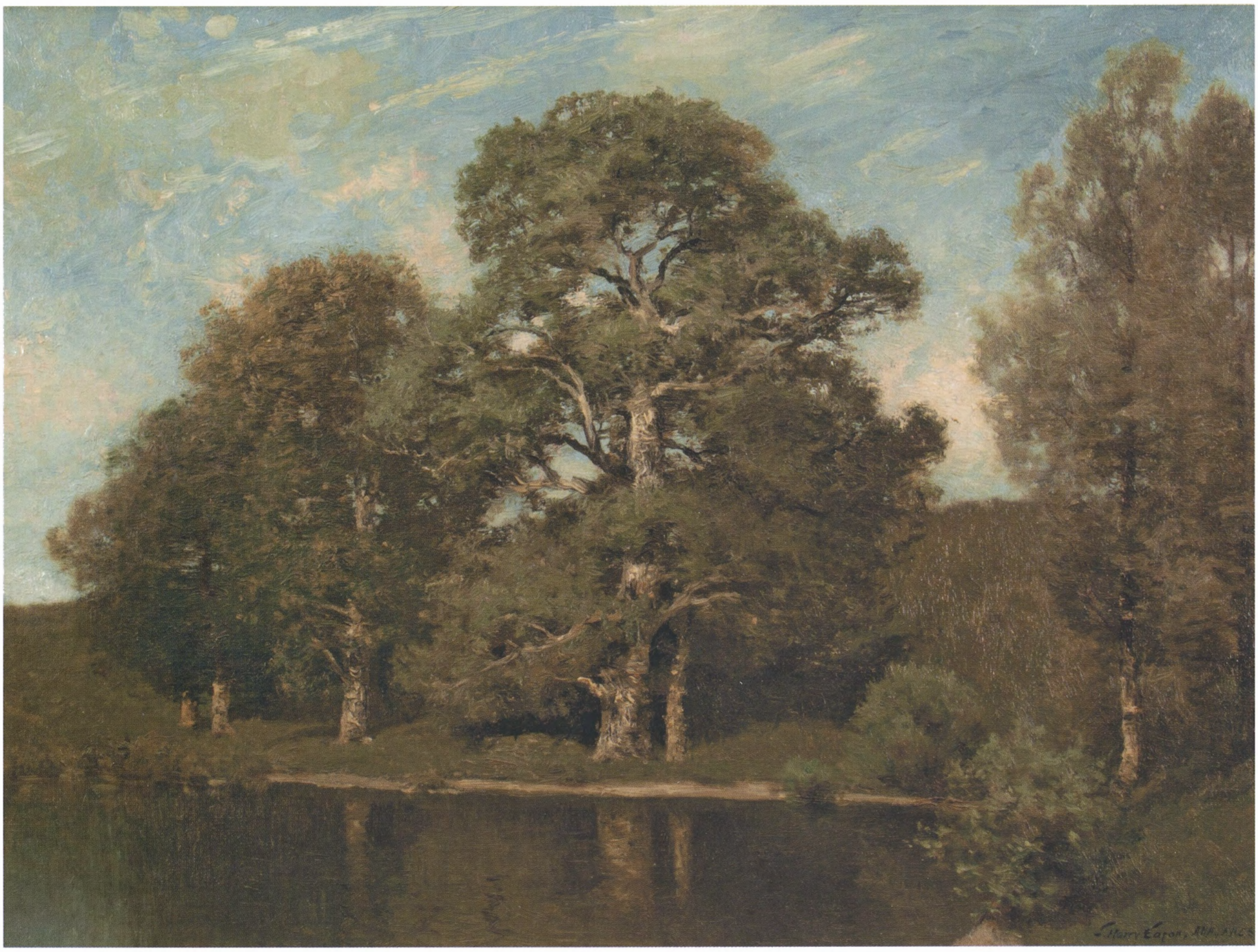


Fig. 6.54. Charles Harry Eaton, *Summer Wind*, c. 1899. Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in. Private collection.

graphic drama and cohere as an integrated whole. The paint handling moves from calm to electric: a calm monotone in the dull reflections in the water and shoreline, a gentle stirring vibration in the greens of the trees, and a charged, jarring facture in the racing cloud forms against the blue sky. The result is a mysterious rhythmic equipoise, a balance of static color planes and agitated masses, evoking the stillness and silence of a summer day and at the same time the uncanny presence of movement, either of wind in the branches or hints of changing weather in the offing: the feeling of changelessness and change, and the mysteries of metamorphosis that so enchanted the late nineteenth-century mind. This increasing focus on the fundamental armature of nature—the contours, shapes, and disposition of landscape forms—seems to have been moving Eaton in the direction of a more symbolic style of painting by 1900, very much in line with Symbolist trends both in America and Europe, and a poignant reminder of what the artist might have accomplished had he lived another two decades. A bronze medal, posthumously bestowed at the 1901 Buffalo Exposition, testified to the respect and admiration of Harry Eaton by his colleagues.

The Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900

The American art world eagerly awaited—with some trepidation and high expectations—the opening of the Paris Exposition Universelle in the summer of 1900. Among the U.S.-based American artists there were scores to settle with their expatriate brethren going back to the Paris Exposition of 1889. In addition, by 1900 there were many new names and rising stars to be accommodated—and a fierce determination by the American art establishment to outdo the competition, if not the French, then certainly the other international exhibitors. Spirits were high in America. The depression of the 1890s was now a bad memory and replaced with a period of growing prosperity that would continue until 1929. The nation had just won the Spanish-American War. With new holdings in Cuba, the Philippines, and elsewhere, America was technically an empire on a par with Britain, France, and Germany. The deaths of Inness, Wyant, and Martin in the decade before saw these men placed among the art immortals of the American landscape. A new generation of Tonalist inheritors, in their prime by 1900, draped themselves in the mantle of this triumvirate. Much of the American artists' expectation and drive to distinguish themselves in Paris was predicated on this Tonalist pedigree—independent of foreign influence, individual, original, an art of sentiment without sentimentality—qualities that were emblematic of the landscapes of Inness, Wyant, and Martin.

In fact, George Inness and his Tonalist pantheon were very nearly enshrined in Paris—along with Whistler—by the American art committee. The United States–based artists, convinced that their expatriate colleagues in the 1889 Paris Exposition had grabbed the lion's share of hanging space, took measures early in the preparations for 1900 to make sure there would be no repetition of that sorry episode. At a gathering at the Century Club, the New York artists selected John Britton Cauldwell (1855–1932), a wealthy, art-knowledgeable, well-connected, and culturally astute businessman to direct the selection process for Paris. Committees from New York and Paris were assembled and a cross-section of American works was selected that ran the gamut of period styles and genres. Besides landscapes, three-fifths of the exhibition consisted of still lifes, portraits, historical scenes, and mythological subjects—all the mainstays of academic art as taught in the Parisian ateliers. Cauldwell had originally chosen Charles Kurtz, who had been instrumental as assistant chief in promoting the Tonalists at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, as assistant director for 1900. But health issues caused Kurtz to resign and he was replaced by the Tonalist artist Henry Snell (*Dockside*, c. 1900, fig. 6.55; *Yellow Coast*, c. 1900, fig. 6.56), soon to be president of both the American Watercolor Society and the New York Water Color Club. Snell, born in 1858, was forty-two in 1900, near the epicenter of his generation of Tonalists born between 1840 and 1865; most were in their forties in 1900, and at the top of their game with prizes to back up their hard-won reputations. The majority of these artists were from the Northeast and New York, though artists associated with Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts would fare extremely well in the final medal count. Snell did not go abroad in search of talent but sought out the New York studios of his colleagues, thus assuring the inclusion of almost all the rising stars of the Tonalist movement, including Snell's closest friends William Lathrop, J. Alden Weir, Charles Warren Eaton (*Berkshire Hills, Autumn*, c. 1910, fig. 6.57), Ben Foster (see *Bercé par le murmure d'un ruisseau* [*Lulled by a Murmuring Stream*] fig. 5.124), Leonard Ochtman (see *Winter Morning*, fig. 5.115), and many other of the younger landscapists. A good number may have lacked the sterling credentials of study in Paris with a famous teacher, nevertheless, given the overheated jingoism of the time, lack of foreign pedigree may well have weighed in their favor.

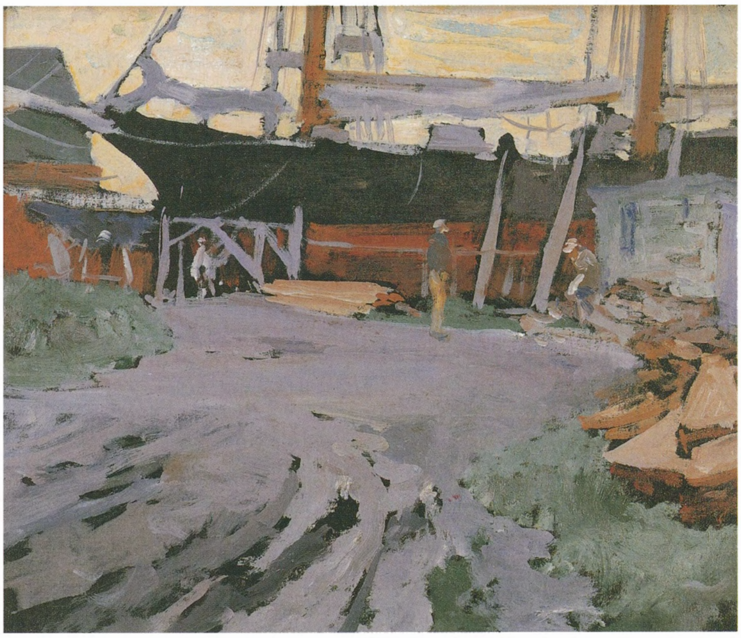


Fig. 6.55. Henry Snell, *Dockside*, c. 1900. Oil on board, 11 x 13 in. Private collection.

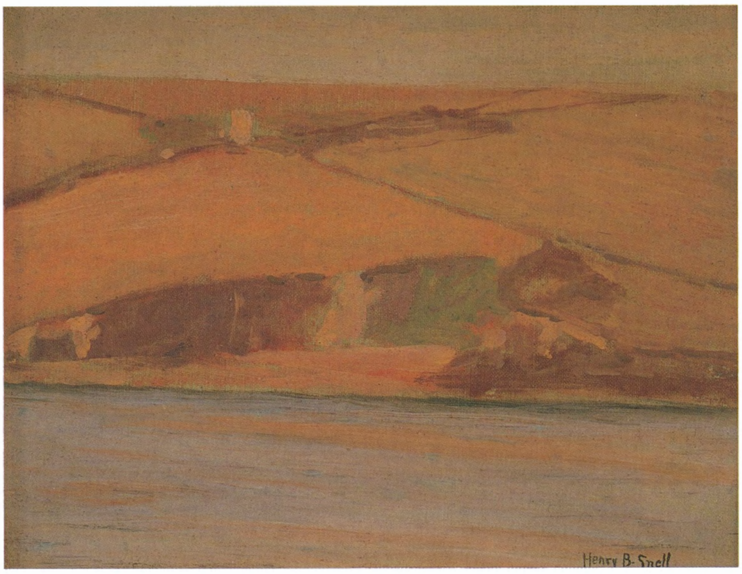


Fig. 6.56. Henry Snell, *Yellow Coast*, c. 1900. Oil on board, 7 x 9 in. Private collection.

Unlike 1893, landscapes made up fully two-fifths of the exhibited work in 1900, the majority of it tonal and depicting native as opposed to foreign scenes. To the consternation of many observers, two of the finest Tonalists, Dwight Tryon and John Henry Twachtman, refused to participate (Tryon was on the New York jury of selection), citing the meager space allocation offered by French officials. This matter of space plagued and embittered the early planning and only hard negotiations late in the process propelled the French to give over more space to the Americans. There was much sniping back and forth between the U.S. contingent and the Paris-based Americans. The final selections probably satisfied no one. The *New York Times* noted the tension and ill feeling after the list of paintings to be exhibited by American artists residing in Paris was announced. "As the days have gone by since the first publication of this list on Wednesday morning, the criticism has grown rather more fervent and pronounced, if possible. Mr. Henry D. Snell and his assistant Charles C. Curran, saved their devoted heads by sailing for Amsterdam on Wednesday

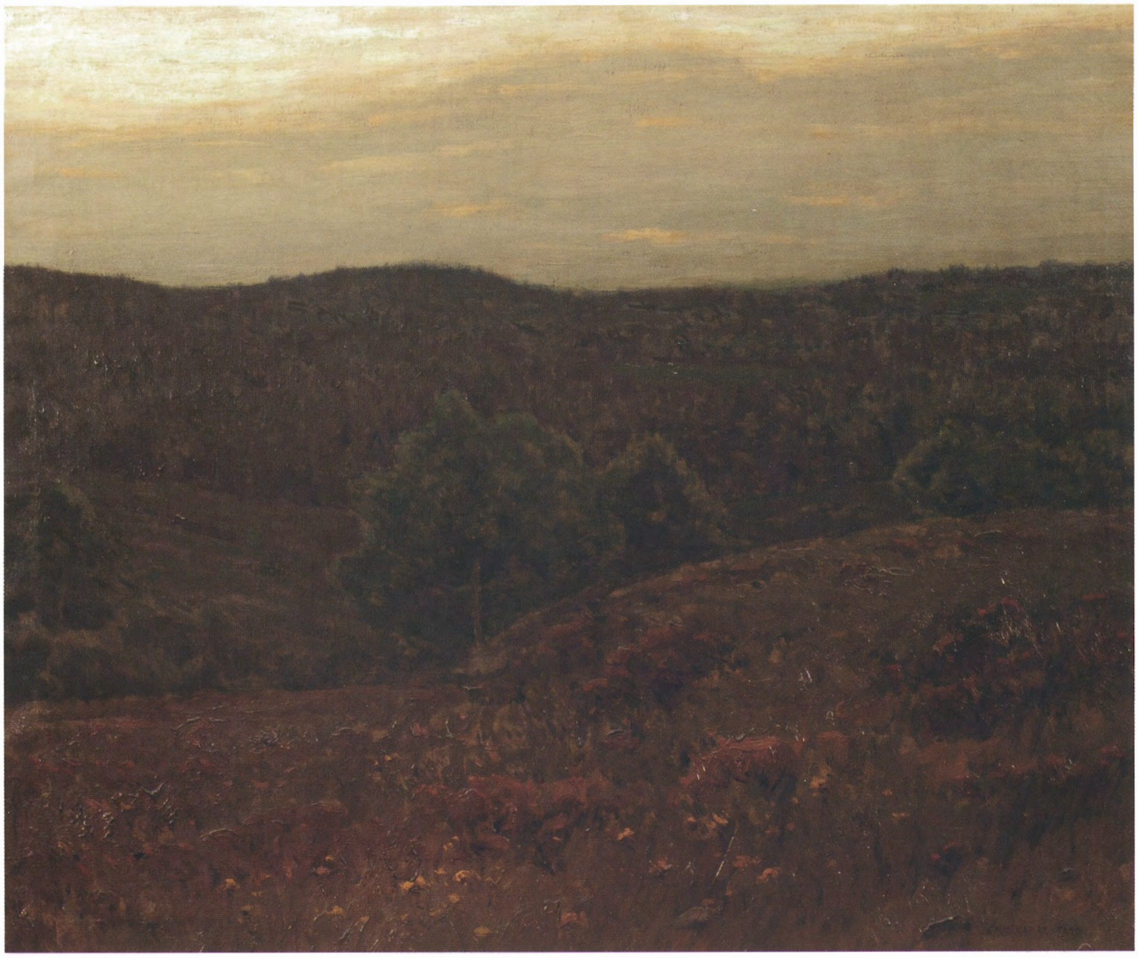


Fig. 6.57. Charles Warren Eaton, *Berkshire Hills, Autumn*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. Private collection.

morning, but Mr. Snell found time before he left to remark that 'the collection as a whole surpasses any hitherto made to represent this country abroad.' There are many who differ with Mr. Snell in his opinion."[62] The Paris-based artists had fewer paintings than their U.S. colleagues, but as might be expected of Salon veterans, many were huge in size. Director Cauldwell went to great lengths to prepare the exhibition spaces with Inness and Whistler in mind, not to mention the majority of low-toned landscapes, figurative, and genre subjects (Eakins, Chase, and Thayer all contributed tonal figurative works), by using wall fabric colored a quiet gray-green to better coordinate with the paintings. In addition, a grayish-toned carpet and cocoa matting had been installed, harmonizing with the walls and the low-toned pictures to be hung. Such installation practices were common in New York by 1900, having been adopted by the Society of American Artists from its earliest days and popularized by Whistler in London in the early 1880s.

Foremost in the minds of the organizers, and spelled out in the guide to the American exhibition, was the desire to prevent the repetition of what had occurred in 1889 when the French had boasted that the United States section "was but a brilliant annex to the French Section." Director Cauldwell wanted a "truly representative American exhibition," a selection that displayed a unique American style. "During the past decade the United States has made unparalleled progress in all things, but in none is this progress more noticeable and pronounced than in the Fine Arts . . . since the Exposition of 1889 American art has to a great degree emancipated itself from foreign trammels, and entered upon a career of its own,—expressing American thought and reflecting American nature. To-day we have many well-equipped institutions in which the student can develop an artistic temperament on his native soil, in which individualism is recognized and encouraged, while the necessary methods of expression are learned . . . To such fearless and dominating personalities as the late George Inness, Homer Martin, A. H. Wyant, and a score of others who are still living, we must look for the establishment of a National Art. These men sound a clear, strong note of originality; and their influence on the art of their country is pronounced and permanent."[63] Cauldwell made sure that the nearly seventy Tonalist landscapes were hung harmoniously and as a group, arranging the galleries "with a view to tonality."[64]

James McNeill Whistler, Alexander Wyant, Homer Dodge Martin (*Westchester Hills*, c. 1890; see fig. 2.26), and George Inness were embraced by the American committee and made the centerpiece of the American section. Unlike 1889, when misunderstandings concerning the number of his works to be hung caused Whistler to exhibit in the English section at

Paris, the expatriate American was firmly in the American fold in 1900. Whistler's fame was at its height; the artist had opened a short-lived art school in Paris, and American and foreign artists flocked to his classes, while legions of young artists in Paris were employing his minimalist, near-monochromatic style. American followers of the "master," like Robert Henri and William Redfield, were living and working in Paris at the time, painting suggestive Tonalist landscapes of Paris and Brittany in dark, mysterious masses of free-flowing pigment. Whistler's reputation only added fuel to the American contingent's determination to be acknowledged as progressive and original contributors to the international art scene. This partly explains why there were so few Impressionist landscapes by Americans at the exposition in 1900, and even those that were shown by Willard Metcalf, Childe Hassam, and the late Theodore Robinson were from the early 1890s, when American Impressionism was at its height, and they were quite tonal in palette. Most of the American landscapes were of domestic scenes, which all agreed was a sanguine development. French critics were, in fact, on the lookout for distinctive native qualities in the foreign exhibitors in Paris—not just imitators of French academic styles and genres—that substantiated the always tantalizing idea that a truly national school should reflect a nation's culture: a fervent and combustible idea that had long preoccupied Charles de Kay and his circle, and a doctrine they had been promoting in America for more than twenty years. De Kay had railed against facile imitation of the French among American artists—especially the figurative, genre, or historical painters, who were most prone to pay respect to French academic ideals. Indeed, it was precisely in figurative and genre work that the Americans failed to demonstrate their independence, their "individuality and originality."

As the exposition opened, even Director Cauldwell concluded that the American figurative and portrait contingent—as had been the case in 1889—had fallen short and in no way epitomized what was new in American art. It was a view echoed by a reviewer in the *Boston Transcript*. "While there is no questioning the merit of our portrait school, as represented at Paris, Americanism may not be predicated on it with the same unhesitating, uncompromising assurance as of our landscape school.... The average American landscape astray in a French exhibit could hardly escape detection; the average American portrait, on the other hand, similarly displaced, might readily be mistaken for the product of a Frenchman's brush."[65] Another American critic, echoing notions that went back more than twenty years in American art criticism, commented on the importance of local color or familiarity with home ground as a factor in producing a distinctive American style. An American artist "may paint brilliant canvases that please for an hour, but in interpreting foreign scenes he must needs look through alien eyes, and his pictures will likely be characterized by lack of sympathy and truth."[66] Ellis T. Clarke railed against the "alien element in American art" in the October 1900 issue of *Brush and Pencil*: "The American exhibit of 1900 is better as a whole than that of 1889, but it is no less un-American, no less untrue to National Ideals and National temperament. Of the painters, etchers, and sculptors upon whom the present exposition has conferred medals, eight are self-confessed exiles—Sargent, Whistler, Abbey, Alexander, Pennell, St. Gaudens, MacMonnies, and Brooks. Of the gross number of artists exhibiting in the American section, seventy-five have taken up European residence, and for indefinite periods or for good have become alien to home and home inspiration."[67]

A *New York Times* report by James B. Townsend, editor of *American Art News*, noted, after exhaustive review of all the international exhibitions, that the American figurative painters were a crashing disappointment. "Too much work by American students or artists not identified with their own country and who have been living and painting abroad for years is shown, with the result that the average visitor from other countries obtains the impression that the American picture exhibit is simply a reflection of modern French art." Townsend was gratified to report the saving grace provided by the American landscapists: the Tonalist artists who represented the true spirit of American art: Charles Platt, J. Alden Weir, Robert Swain Gifford, Homer Dodge Martin, Alexander Wyant (who produced work similar to *September Morning*, c. 1880–90, fig. 6.58), George Inness, J. Francis Murphy, Charles Warren and Charles Harry Eaton, Hugh Bolton Jones, and Ralph Albert Blakelock. While esteeming John Singer Sargent, J. White Alexander, and the African American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner as Americans of great artistic worth, Townsend noted the absence of "such original American painters as Dewing, Dewey, Tryon... Twachtman," and the "inadequate representation of such painters as... Bogert, Wiggins, Kost, Clark, Bruce Crane, W. L. Lathrop, De Haven, and others...." Townsend suggested that art more "truly representative in choice of subject, feeling, and technique of the American art of to-day," might have been had from recent exhibitions of the Society of American Artists, the Society of Landscape Painters, The Ten, the Pennsylvania Academy, and the Carnegie Institute.[68] One of Townsend's absentees, Charles Melville Dewey, told the *New York Times*, "I had no paintings on exhibition at the exposition, but I do not care to say why. The American exhibit was a great disappointment to me. It was badly hung, badly lighted, and there was no artistic effect displayed whatever. There were such incongruous combinations, for example, as sage-green walls with salmon-colored carpets.... This was not all. For instance, Abbey and Sargent, neither of whom is an American, both being Royal Academicians, sent pictures to the English exhibit, but the authorities would not hang them there, but sent them to the American exhibit."[69]

Dewey's criticism offers a glimpse of the passions, jingoistic and artistic, swirling around the Paris Exposition Universelle

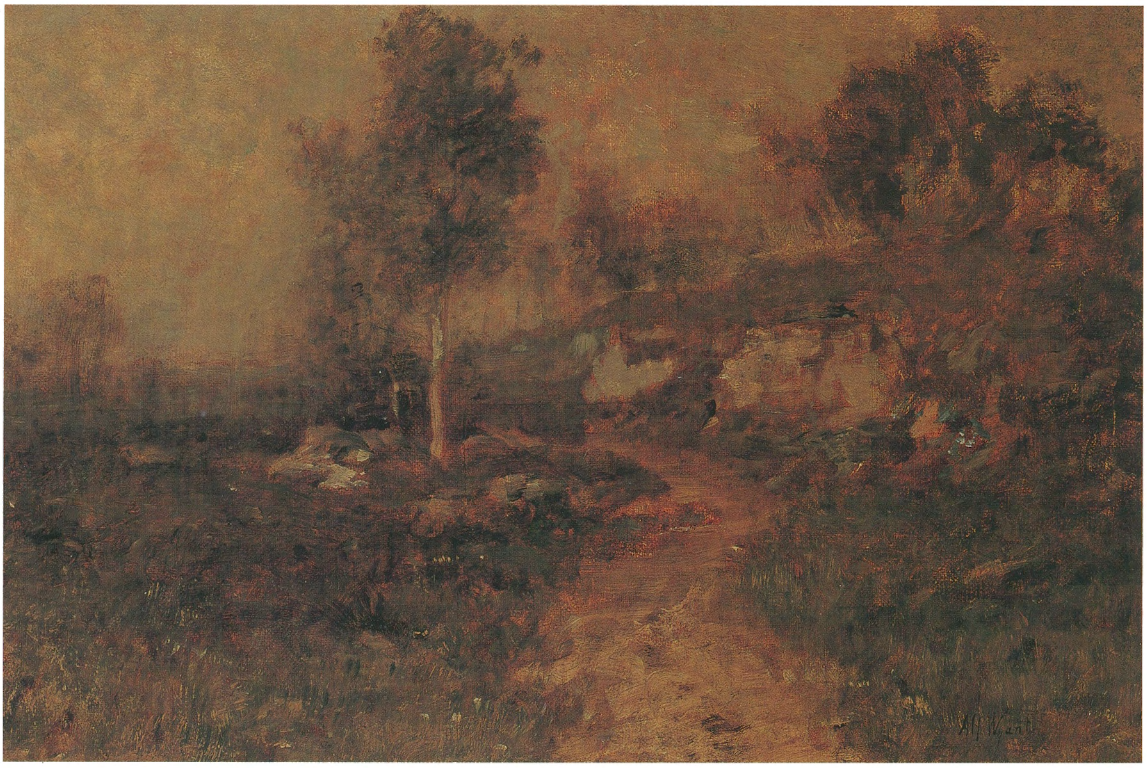


Fig. 6.58. Alexander Wyant, *September Morning*, c. 1880–90. Oil on canvas, 10 x 16 in. Anonymous collection.

of 1900. A similar point was reiterated by the *New York Times*'s Paris correspondent Rowland Strong. "In every foreign section a goodly proportion of the pictures belong to the modern French school. Every eminent French master of to-day, the Carolus Durans, the Jean Paul Laurens, the Henners, the Monets, the Menards—the impressionist masters especially—has his host of foreign imitators. And even when the pupil is not a mere imitation the influence of his master, a Frenchman, can almost invariably be traced. As a mere statistic, and without wishing to draw any special conclusion from it, I may point out that in the American section alone, out of 221 painters who exhibit, only about 50 do not proclaim themselves in the catalogue to be the pupils of this or that French master."[70] Another staff correspondent of the *Times* came to a similar conclusion, although noting a "strong and unclassifiable individuality," in the American section.[71]

For most commentators, American and French, the American landscapes represented the "strong and unclassifiable individuality," and formed the best and most distinctive part of the American exhibition. For inherent native sympathy and truth, George Inness's landscapes were acknowledged by critics as the closest thing to an American school: "The great reputation which Mr. Inness enjoys in the States is cordially confirmed by the opinion of French critics over here. His 'Mill Pond' has been very much admired, and his 'Sunny Autumn Day,' with its rich russet tones and delicate sunlit atmosphere, is even better liked."[72] Of the older generation of Tonalists, Inness, Wyant, and Martin were practically canonized as the patron saints of American art. Director Caudwell considered Inness's three landscape contributions as the focal point of the American section and cause for renewed respect for the American landscape school by foreign critics.[73] Inness's *Sunny Autumn Day*, 1892 (fig. 6.59), was an apt late work displaying the hallmarks of the artist's synthetic style: beautifully composed, true to life yet decorative, full of dreamy passages of exquisite tonal modulations, and evocative of a symbolic reality underlying the everyday. Homer Dodge Maritn's contribution, *Newport Neck*, 1893 (see fig. 2.25), also a late work by the deceased artist, was a brooding spare landscape filled with the existential despair of the artist's final years of near poverty. It is telling that Alexander Harrison, doyen of the American art colony in Paris (and model or artist character, Elstir, in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, see chap. 7), exhibited four of his inimitable signature-style twilit marines in 1900, much in keeping with the trends among European painters who had employed various derivations on Whistlerian symbolism, a direction apparent throughout the international section of the exposition. Even Winslow Homer touched on the international penchant for dreamy and sensuous nocturnes, with the hauntingly symbolic and free-form fluidity of his *Summer Night*, circa 1890s (Musée d'Orsay), which along with a work by Ben Foster, was one of two American pictures bought by the French government. The *New York Times* observed, "[T]he very striking seascapes by Winslow Homer, one representing two girls dancing in front of a moonswept sea, the other a great weight of wave dashing on to the coast of Maine, have all attracted much attention here and high praise."[74] Homer's powerful, pure seascapes, such as *Maine Coast*, 1896 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art), with its strong tonal feel and decorative construct, evoked a patriotic reaction from fellow American artist Francis Hopkinson Smith, who felt the picture "... could have kept an American bareheaded for hours if he had enough red corpuscles running through his veins to set his heart tingling when his eye lighted on some master-effort of his countryman. If there was another landscape in the Exposition expressing more power, truth, beauty and poetry... I could not find it."[75] His list described the core attributes of the Tonalist movement.

The American Tonalists may have been overwhelmed both by French styles and the huge Salon machines, but they more than held their own, garnering many of the 114 medals accumulated by the Americans, more than any other nation with the exception of France and Belgium—again matching the achievement of 1889. Whistler and Sargent took the grand prizes, while Homer, Alexander Harrison, William Merritt Chase, Abbott Thayer, Cecilia Beaux, and George de Forest Brush were awarded the gold. Perhaps most significantly, the majority of the Americans who won silver and bronze medals or honorable mentions were homegrown Tonalists, many attuned to progressive Post-Impressionist styles, representative of Whistlerian "uncertainty" and aspects of the Symbolist movement, examples of which could be found throughout the international section of the exposition. Fewer of the expatriate Americans won medals in 1900 than in 1889, perhaps indicating that most of the French judges were indeed on the lookout for distinctive national character, signs of an *école nationale* among the Americans, rather than mere imitators of prevailing French academic models. Many of the Tonalist landscapes, especially those by such artists as Charles Warren Eaton, J. Francis Murphy, Frederick W. Kost, William Redfield (see fig. 8.89, *Charenton Bridge over the Marne*, 1900, for an example of the work Redfield produced at this time), and William Lathrop, displayed a near-family resemblance to late landscapes by Degas and Monet, and early landscapes and cityscapes by Kandinsky, Nolde, Mondrian, Bonnard, Vuillard, and others. As will be discussed, the expressive symbolic modes writ large throughout the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, very much under the sway of Whistler's tenebrous style, were common to both the American Tonalists and many of the most advanced European artists. Among the Americans, the smaller-scale intimate landscapes of Aesthetic Tonalism, with its emphasis on charming pattern and cool balance, was much less apparent than in 1889, replaced by larger more broadly

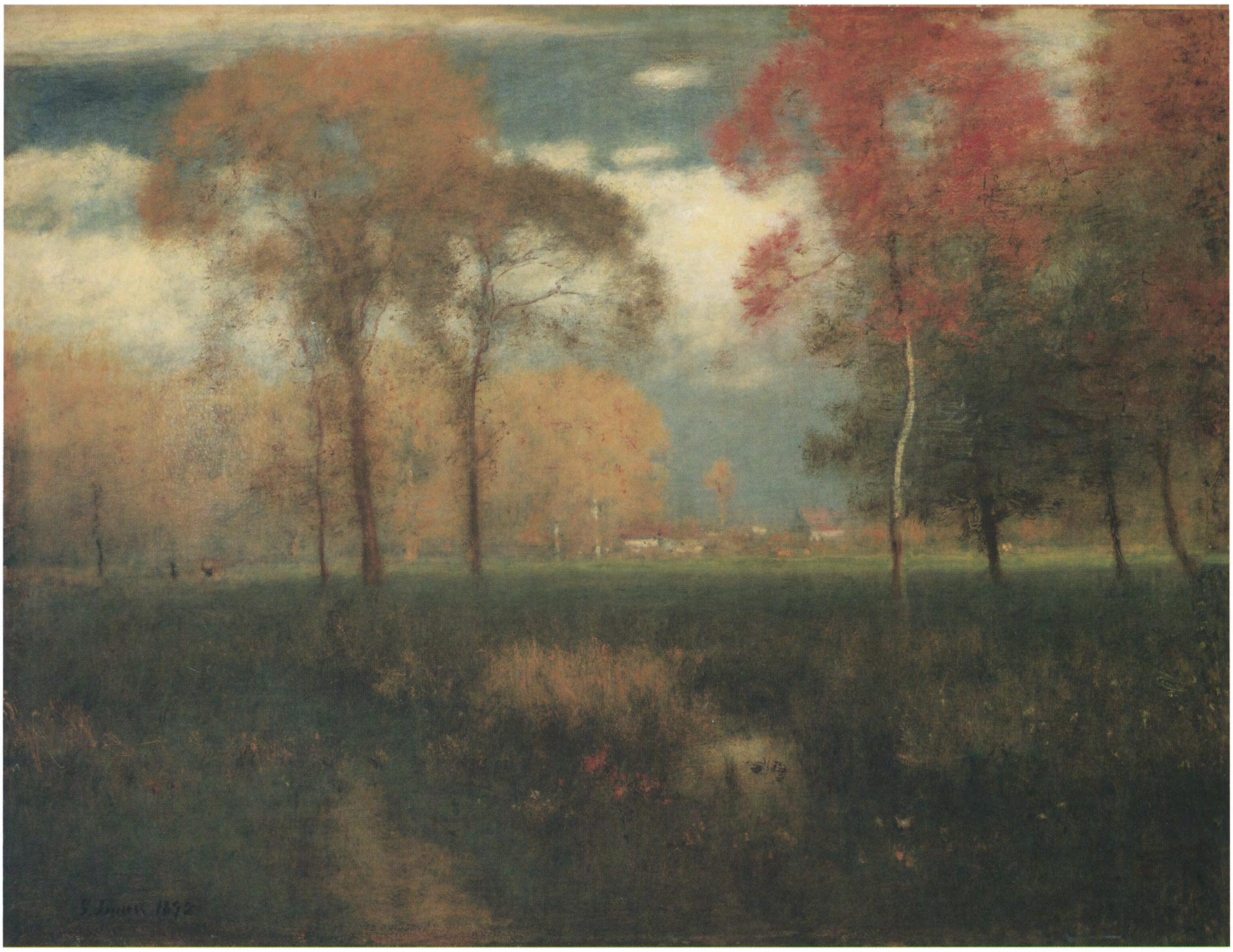


Fig. 6.59 George Inness, *Sunny Autumn Day*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 31.8 x 41.7 in. The Cleveland Museum of Art, anonymous gift, 1956.578.

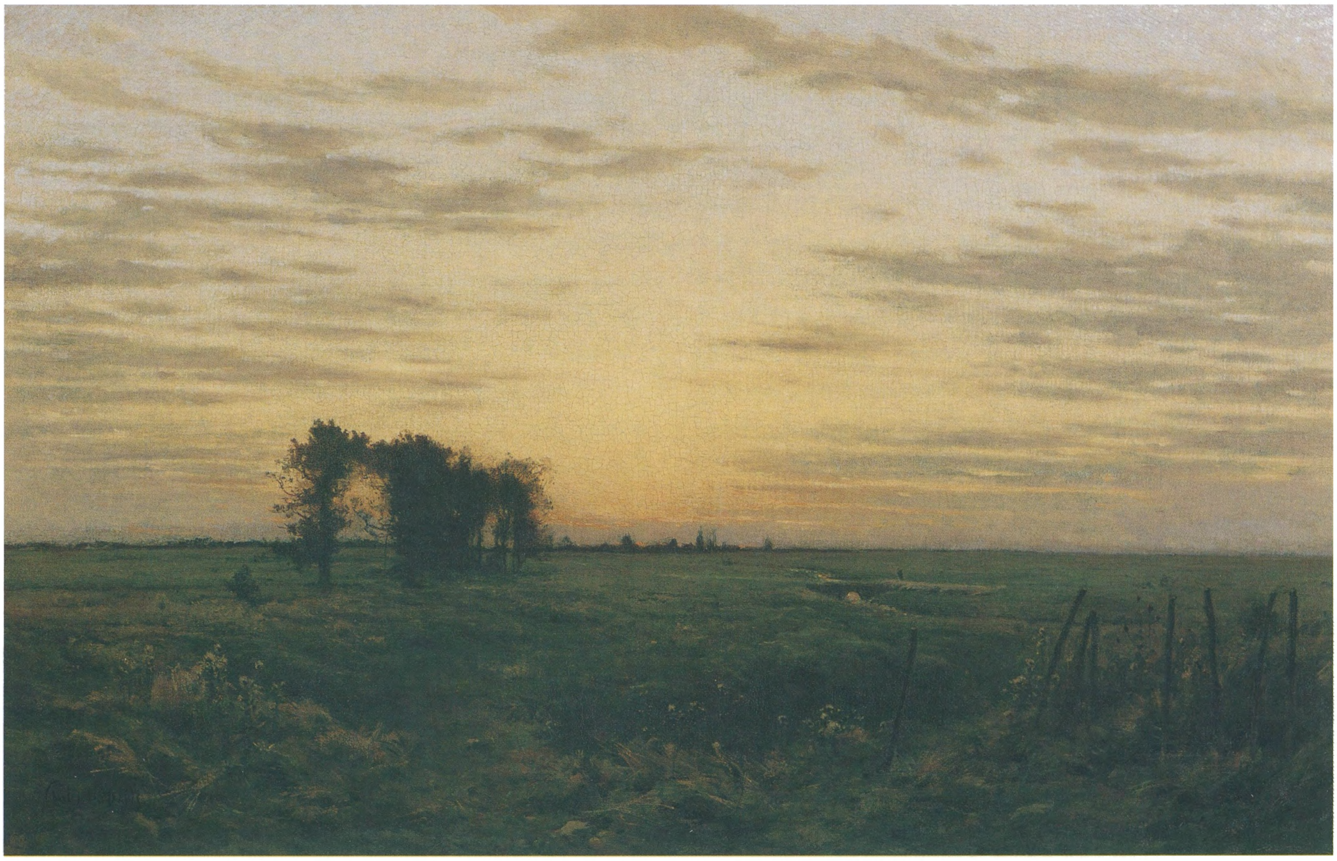


Fig. 6.60. Charles Harold Davis, *Twilight*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 28½ x 45½ in. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Mabon, London.

rendered offerings, more expressive in paint handling, many emphasizing mysterious and shadowy tree forms of a distinctly symbolist flavor. This trend would take on a life of its own in the first decade of the new century on both sides of the Atlantic.

An additional change from the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 was the positive showing by the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Its instructors and pupils—among them Pennell, Fromuth, and Chase—won no fewer than nineteen medals, seven gold, four silver, three bronze, and five honorable mentions. Another alumnus of the Pennsylvania Academy, Alexander Harrison, who sat on the international jury of awards, was ineligible and so did not add to his long list of medals from previous years. A snapshot of the prize-winning Americans would include William Gedney Bunce (bronze medal), who painted extraordinary Tonalist views of Venice with an expressionist vigor of facture going back to his early training in Munich. Bruce Crane (bronze medal), would garner fame for his mist-shrouded meadows near Old Lyme, his best painted with delicacy and a haunting Whistlerian mystery. Charles Harold Davis (bronze medal), well acquainted with French tastes, submitted his *Twilight*, painted in 1884 in Fleury (fig. 6.60), a mesmerizing example of his early, memory-infused tonal landscapes of France. Charles Warren Eaton (honorable mention) would go on to win a *médaille troisième classe* at the Paris Salon of 1906, among other prizes, and would produce some of his finest Expressionist and Symbolist work between 1900 and 1910, depicting white pines in Thompsonville, Connecticut, and moonlit poplars in Bruges, all with eerie symbolist overtones and compelling decorative abstraction, similar to *Hillside Pines*, circa 1905 (fig. 6.61) and *Bruges Moonlight*, c. 1910 (fig. 6.62). Ben Foster (bronze medal) had his Symbolist landscape, *Bercé par le murmure d'un ruisseau* (*Lulled by a Murmuring Stream*; see fig. 5.124), bought by the French government from the 1900 exposition. Frederick W. Kost (honorable mention) would go on to paint landscapes with decidedly soft-edged Art Nouveau forms, such as *Russet Tree*

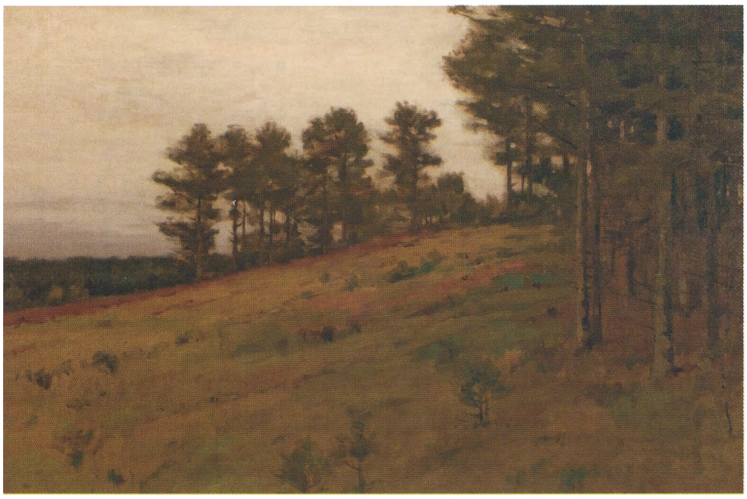


Fig. 6.61. Charles Warren Eaton, *Hillside Pines*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

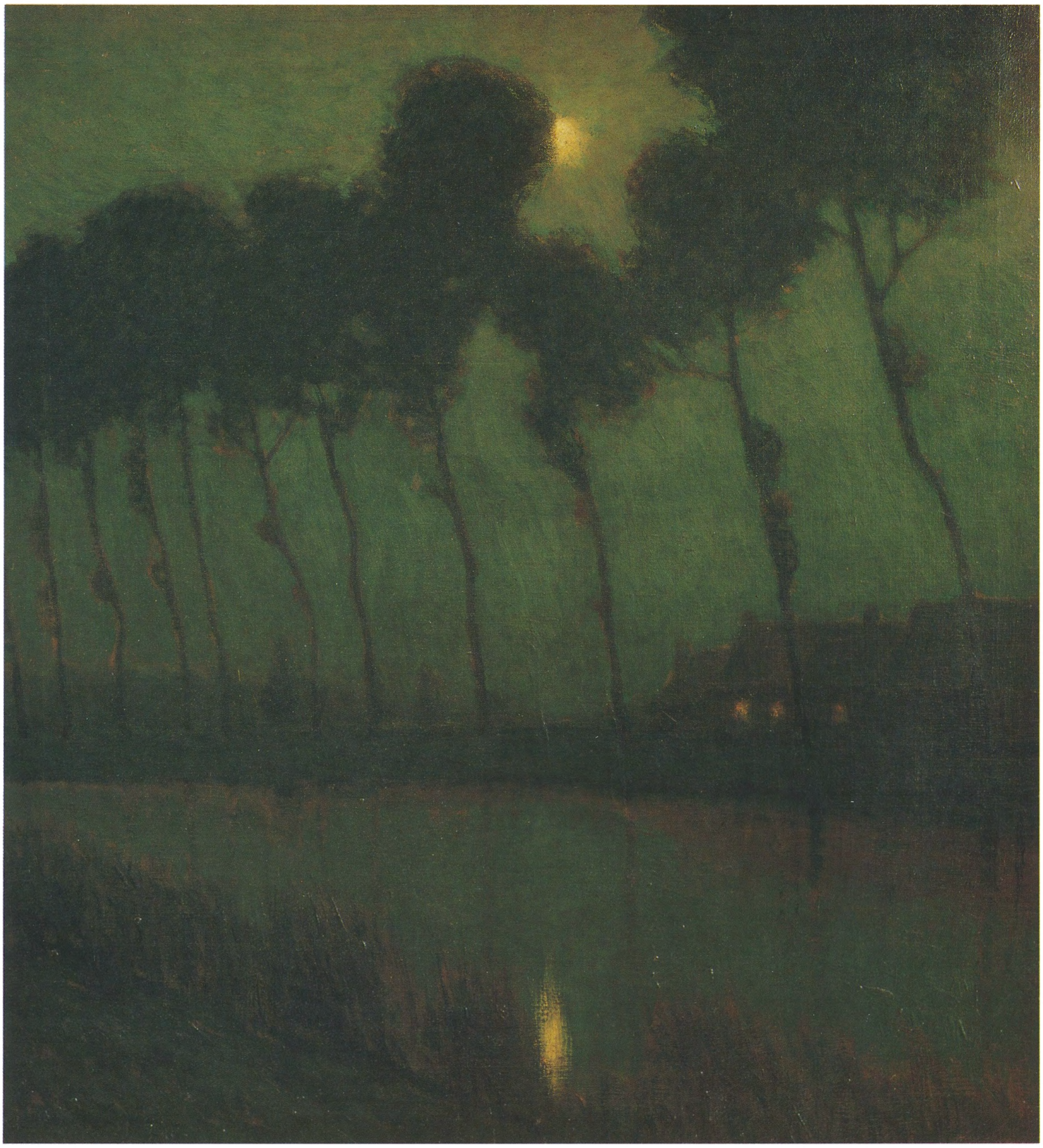


Fig. 6.62. Charles Warren Eaton, *Bruges Moonlight*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 36 x 30 in. Private collection.

Forms, circa 1910 (fig. 6.63). J. Francis Murphy (honorable mention) would continue after 1900 to paint some of his most abstract and expressionist landscapes, including *Sunlit Stubble*, 1918 (fig. 6.64). Although Murphy's late style, especially his use of textured surfaces and spare, minimalist markings, is unlike anything found in Europe, the personal symbology of natural forms Murphy developed after 1900 is only one more confirmation of the fact that he and his Tonalist colleagues did not remain frozen in place—relics of turn-of-the-century American art—but, in fact, drew on the inspiration of the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 to move forward in the mainstream with their more adventurous European counterparts, incorporating aspects of Art Nouveau, and Post-Impressionist movements along Expressionist and Symbolist lines. For many Americans in the early twentieth century, the exposition was a memorable and significant moment: "America was no longer represented by a few talented men but by a whole school of painters, and the American artists stood second only to the French in awards. One need but recall the brooding calm of twilight as painted by Charles H. Davis, the mystery of a moonlit turn of road as painted by Benjamin Foster, the sunshine of New England meadows by Leonard Ochtman, the broad stretches of plowed fields by Bruce Crane . . . to appreciate that America has produced a school of landscape painters who have a refined sense of the characteristic and a flexible command of material."[76]

Viewed from a twenty-first-century vantage point, the Paris exposition Universelle of 1900 marks a watershed in American art. It was both a culmination of twenty years of innovation and a point of departure for innovations still to come. The Exposition was the transition point that set the stage for the most talented of the younger generation (the radicals of the late 1870s who were by 1900 middle-aged), allowing them to evolve a mature and more formally abstract style, which encompassed modernist trends of a Symbolist and Expressionistic character. Although the Americans showed great competency across a broad range of styles, it was their Tonalist landscapes, both in quality and quantity, that displayed an originality and distinctiveness distinguishing them from other national schools, yet aligning them with progressive trends among the most forward-looking international artists. The historian Samuel Isham, in his 1905 *History of American Painting,* gave voice to this native proclivity for tonal landscapes of a deeply poetic nature, a movement that by 1900 had all the hallmarks of a national school.

"Moreover, less stress is laid here than in Europe on workmanship and more on sentiment, the indwelling emotion which may be felt, but its quality or genuineness is hardly measurable by any definite standard. There is a certain loose union into groups resulting from similarities of training or temperament, but quite as often as not the affiliations are impermanent and traceable with difficulty... (the) 'tonal' quality which runs through so much American landscape work that it has become a sort of descriptive epithet of a school is not uncommon abroad. It came originally from the study of the Barbizon masters and similar works, and it has always been influenced by foreign examples; but in no other country has it affected any such proportion of the landscape work as in America. And nowhere else is the attempt so general to infuse personal feeling into the copying of nature."[77]

Isham, a talented portraitist himself, was an astute observer of his generation. After 1900 the American interest in sentiment, "the indwelling emotion" underlying the bittersweet poetics of Aesthetic Tonalism, had developed, like the American nation, a more muscular self-confident power, which subsequently made itself felt in larger-sized canvases and expressiveness of paint handling, and in many cases, a more profound exploration of the agony and ecstasy of the human lot. This new vigor, along with interest in literary and religious expressions of a symbolic or metaphorical character, and in Darwinian revolution that had galvanized the American literary and artistic community in the later part of the nineteenth century, led to the development of a Tonalist style full of intensity and angst: Expressive Tonalism.

This point was made by the art historian Robert Rosenblum in his masterful 2000 re-creation of the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle.[78] Rosenblum's intention was to examine the prevailing diversity of styles in 1900 in an attempt to decipher both present and future trends encompassed

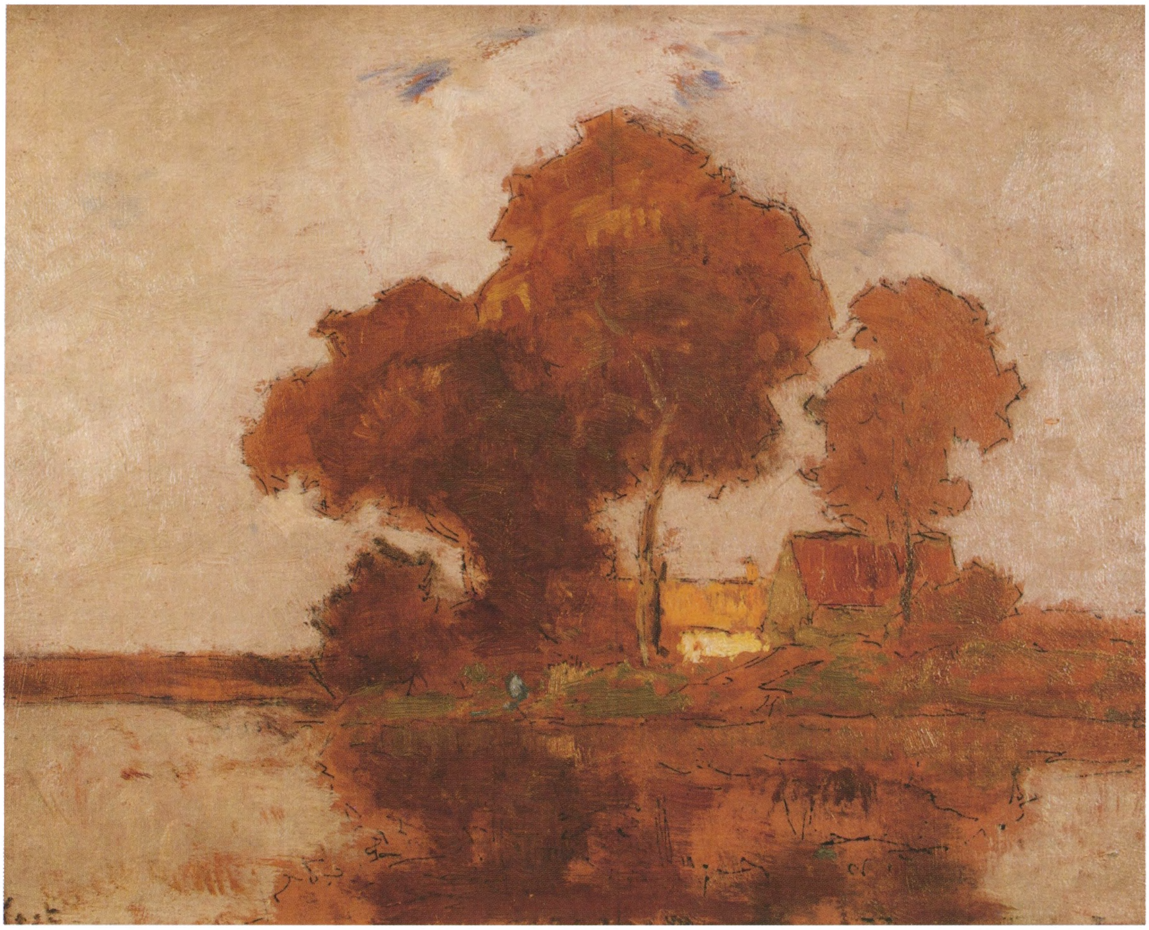


Fig. 6.63. Frederick W. Kost, *Russet Tree Forms*, c. 1910. Oil on panel, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

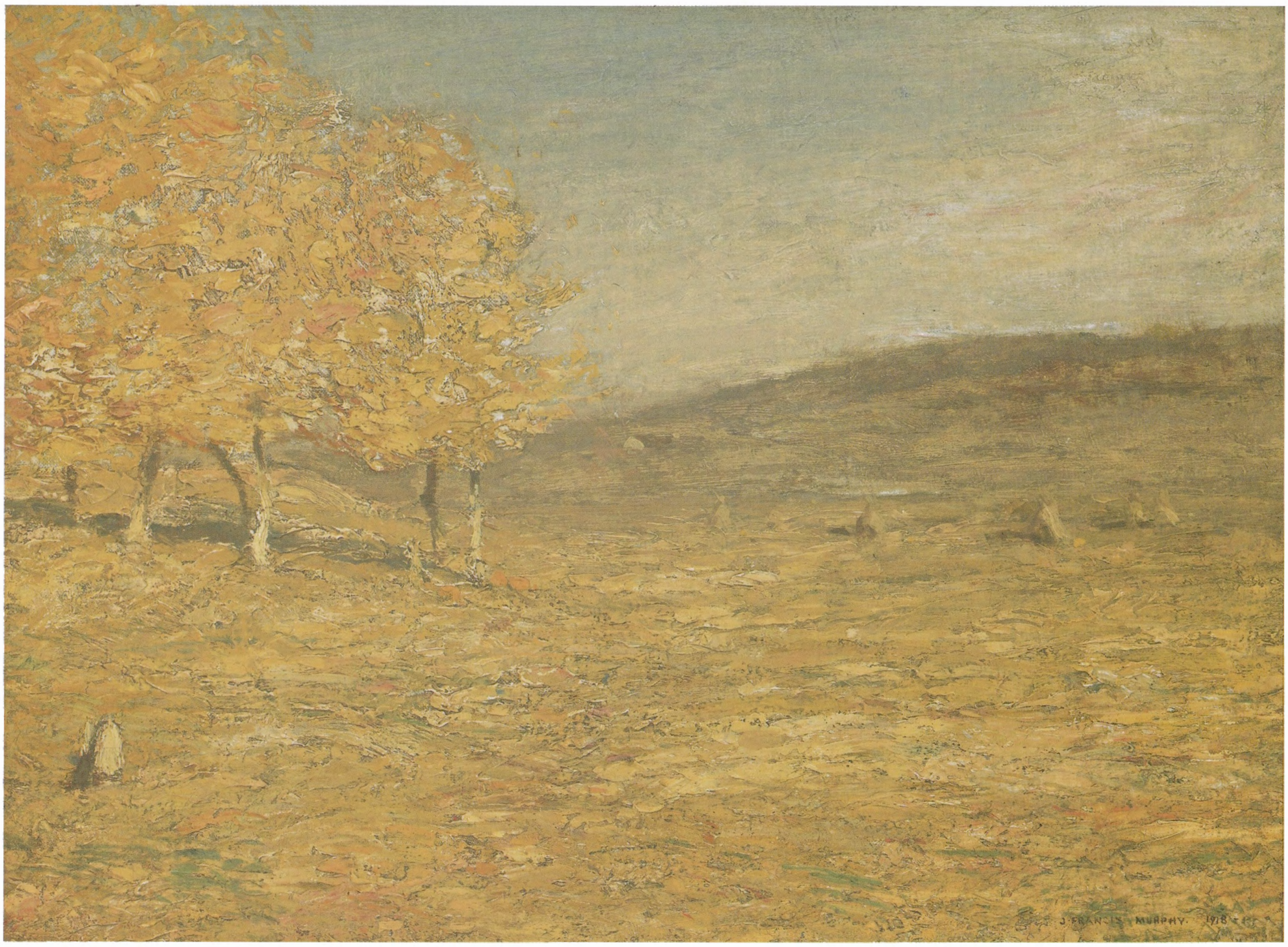


Fig. 6.64. J. Francis Murphy, *Sunlit Stubble*, 1918. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

by the huge number of works on view. The competing styles and national schools on display offered a rare snapshot of the international art scene on the eve of the modernist explosion of Post-Impressionist styles. Out of this murky mélange of changing tastes and fleeting fashions would emerge Cubism, Surrealism, and Expressionism. The Americans featured in the exhibition differed from the Europeans most dramatically in subject matter, concentrating on landscape rather than the figurative. Even the most imitative of the American academic painters, or those who employed variations on the then current international Impressionist style, rarely dealt with political, social, or even mythological and religious subject matter to the extent found in many European sections at the Paris Exposition. References, oblique or otherwise, to Marx and Freud were almost entirely absent from the American section.

Where American artists connected time and time again with their European counterparts, according to Rosenblum, was in the romanticized landscape—"reviving a major motif of Romanticism"— representing an escape from urban life and all the unsettling disturbances of the modern world. Rosenblum compared Cézanne's preoccupation with the landscape around Mont Sainte-Victoire to the work of American Tonalists Augustus Vincent Tack (1870–1949), who painted *Cloud Wrack,* circa 1900 (fig. 6.65; although Rosenblum did not cite this work), and Albert Pinkham Ryder, noting in his exhibition catalogue of a snow-laden mountain landscape by Tack: "So immaterial is this hazy, iridescent vision of cloud, snow, rock and sky that it may be no surprise that Tack, like other turn-of-the-century landscape painters (among them Mondrian and Kandinsky), would cross the brink of nature into abstraction."[79] Rosenblum drew further connections between Ryder's and Homer's seascapes and those of the German artist Emil Nolde: "... these northern seas could become equally engulfing apparitions, veils of dim light that camouflage distinctions between sea and sky and leave us floating, light-years away from the tug of gravity and the modern city."[80] Akin to the romantic impulse in American and European landscapes were the dreamy visions of the Symbolists. Again, Rosenblum points to Monet's Whistlerian strategies in his Tonalist views of London and Charing Cross Bridge, and later his gardens at Giverny, as harbingers of the Symbolist turn to mindscapes, the unconscious, and the imagination. "Monet transforms his subject into a magical scrim of vibrant sensations, a colour-drenched atmosphere that pulverizes everything—people, trees, railway bridges—into a mysterious threshold of the imagination... These through-the-looking-glass experiences

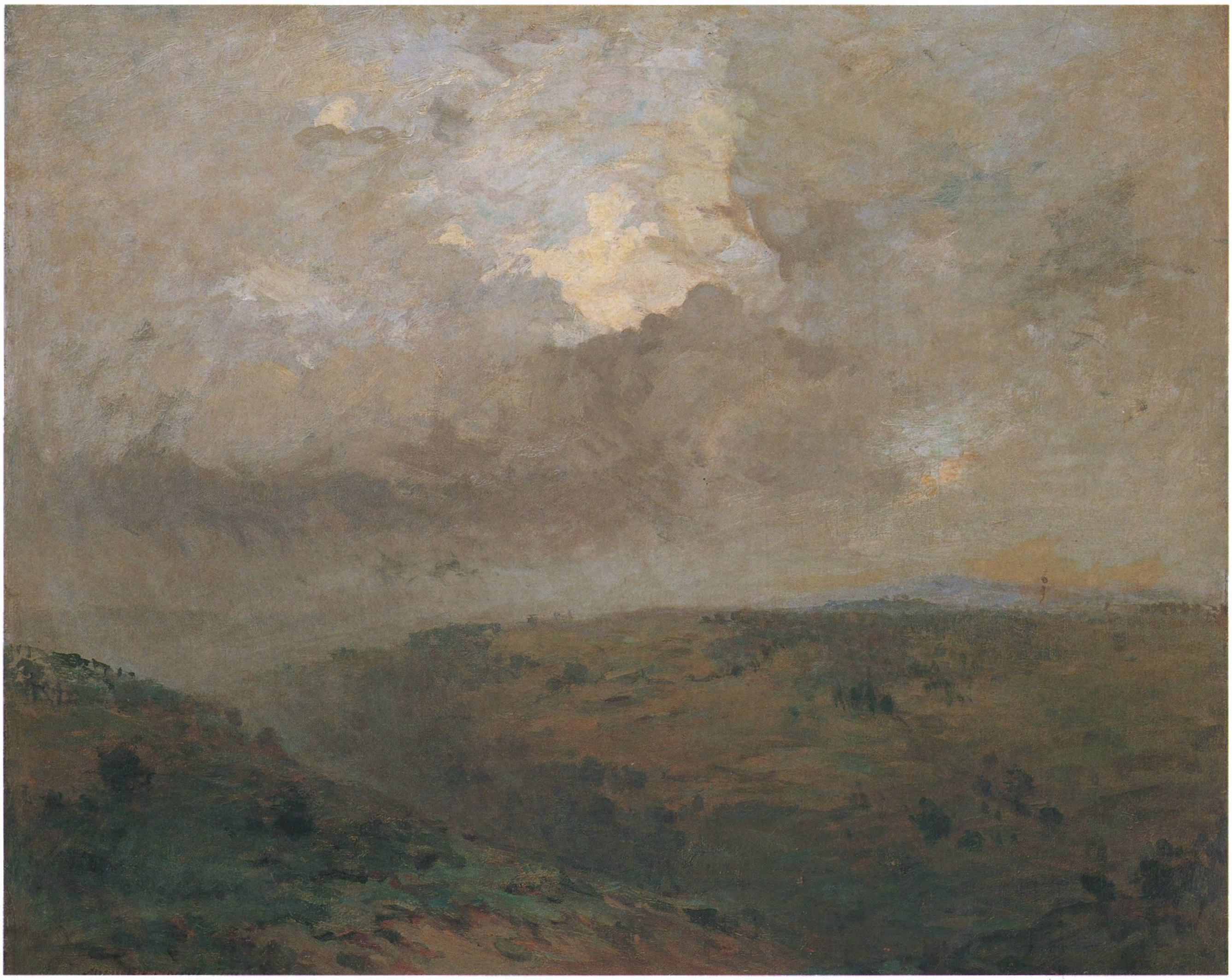


Fig. 6.65. Augustus Vincent Tack, *Cloud Wrack*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 29⅜ x 36⅛ in. Acquired from the estate of Agnes Gordon Tack by 1959. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

that lead to invisible realms correspond to the Symbolists' search for a gravity-defying, immaterial pictorial language appropriate to a growing retreat from commonplace life. Such moods and screen-like structures can be found in many other landscape paintings around 1900, such as Klimt's fragile fantasy of poplar trees.... Mondrian's view of the River Gein in his native Holland...."[81] Rosenblum goes on to describe Bonnard, Vuillard, and Vallotton, especially in their interior scenes, as artists tapping into this vein of "mysterious séance in which figures appear and disappear, camouflaged by textures and patterns whose sensuous surfaces turn everyday prose into evanescent poetry."[82]

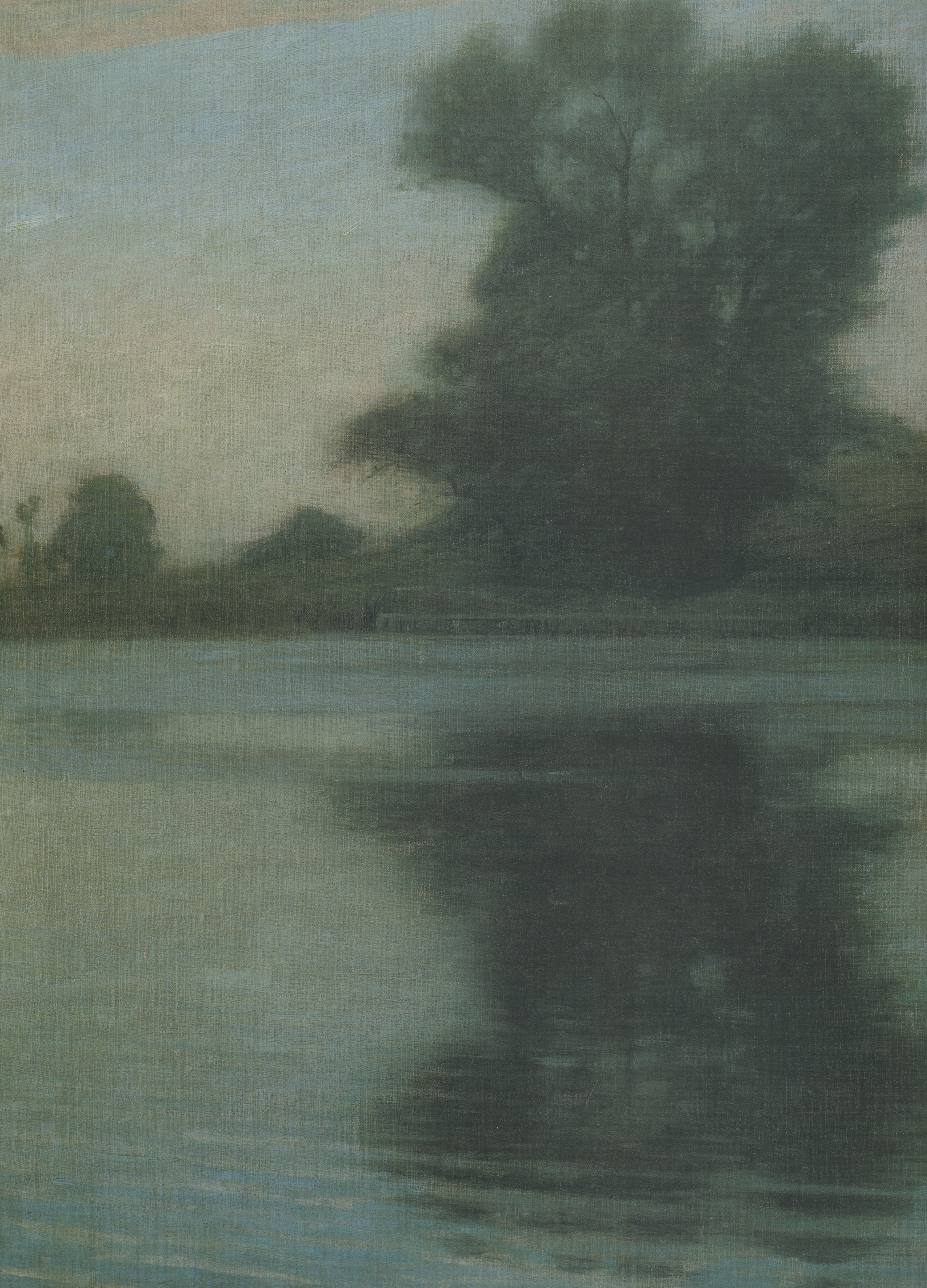
Although Ryder and Tack were not actually included in the 1900 Paris Exposition, artists like Charles Warren Eaton, Ben Foster, William Redfield, J. Francis Murphy, Kost, and Inness (all prizewinners) contributed Tonalist works with a distinct family likeness to the kind of romantic Symbolist strain of landscape that Rosenblum found throughout the French decennial. "Other artists heightened the abstract qualities of color and line to intensify the emotive power of their landscapes. The Polish artist Stanislawski weaves the sinuous outlines of poplar trees, clouds and reflections into a decorative design that conveys the spiritual force he felt in nature... while Klimt's shimmering flame-like poplar vibrates with a mystical intensity... Cypress trees, clustered like dark sentinels, add a mysterious and foreboding backdrop to the mausoleum in Keller's *The Tomb of Bocklin*... In the late 1880s and 1890s, the Romantics' intensely subjective experience of landscape resurfaced, often with a Symbolist inflection. Even Degas, the most trenchant observer of real-life situations could, around 1900, paint landscapes in which topographical facts are diffused with more than a hint of Symbolist mystery... And Monet, once the leading exponent of Impressionism's unmediated factual records, could conjure in his *Mornings on the Seine* the most dreamy evocations of light and water... The transporting, quasi-religious power of landscape was a *fin-de-siècle* leitmotif that linked artists from different countries and artistic traditions."[83]

Rosenblum's "transporting, quasi-religious power of landscape," what in other writings on landscapes by Whistler, Ryder, and Rothko the historian described as Transcendentalist and visionary, or evoking a "Anglo-American tradition of puritanical aestheticism"—power, truth, beauty, and poetry—was deeply embedded throughout the American section of the Paris Exposition in 1900.[84] The subtle dynamism of many of these landscapes, and their inherent abstraction, was lost and often overwhelmed—as so many American observers complained—by the huge Salon machines so favored by French academic art, as well as by the often brilliant and sunny platitudes of international Impressionism—itself fast becoming an academic style. Nevertheless, Cauldwell had hung the Tonalist landscapes as a group, where they impressed the French as transcriptions of a genuine American spirit, and thus garnered the majority of medals.

Nevertheless, Cauldwell had hung the Tonalist landscapes as a group, where they impressed the French as transcriptions of a genuine American spirit, and thus garnered the majority of the medals. Cauldwell's strategy to highlight the coherence of the homegrown Tonalist landscapists was clear to the American critic for *The Nation*. "Acres of the usual Salon commonplaces must be waded through before you come to the few pictures of importance, either in themselves or in the history of the last decade. But in the United States section small room is left for commonplace... I know the work of American artists who live in London and Paris, who exhibit year after year, in the Academy and the two Salons, and who in their art, are usually as French as the native-born Frenchman. The work of American artists who stay at home I know less well, and yet to it one must look for the development of any purely American characteristics... I found that not only has the little group of cool green rooms a greater air of distinction because of its very simplicity than the others; that not only does it contain examples of the most distinguished artists of to-day; but that, in the average of the pictures, there is a more complete expression of personality, far more freshness of vision and individuality of observation, than in any of the foreign sections...." The reviewer for *The Nation* signaled out the Tonalist landscapists as forming, "a distinct school of American landscapes," artists who look for both truth and beauty, "a beauty that shall not be lost, as too often happens in the present dealer-boomed, made-and-sold-while-you-wait phase of so-called impressionism. The painters of the American group never forget this beauty is the study of the vibration of light, the quality of color under varying atmospheric conditions, the division and subdivision of tones into streaks of paint, or any other problem however absorbing in itself." Whistler, Inness, Leonard Ochtman, Walter Nettleton, Charles Warren Eaton, Charles Platt, J. Alden Weir, William Coffin, Bruce Crane, Charles H. Davis, J. Francis Murphy, and other Americans are praised for capturing the peculiar qualities of atmosphere under various conditions, and doing so "without any reference to European work." The Tonalists' "motive as a rule, is the simplest, as if to emphasize the fact that the magic is in light, in atmosphere... There is always evidence of something seen, something observed, something felt." After heralding Homer's great late seascapes, the reviewer sums up his reaction: "In a word, it is the genuineness of the land- and sea-scapes that impresses one. They are the work of men who have learned all the schools can teach technically, but are not hampered by tradition nor bound by convention; men who are alive to the fact that a picture, though true, may be a thing of beauty; and this, of course, was exactly the stand of the Romanticists, of Mr. Whistler when he painted his nocturnes. They do not strive after technical eccentricity, they make no attempt at classicism, at what is called impressionism, or any other ism, except Americanism. There is no doubt that the exhibition proves absolutely that we have a genuine school of American landscape."[85]

The reviewer for *The Nation* reiterated what Charles de Kay had long maintained, that Tonalism, as a distinct American aesthetic, succeeded best when it was most personal and free of academic and foreign influence: the forthright expression of an individual. By 1900, the great individualists, Victorian outsiders like Thoreau, Whitman, and Poe—along with Inness, Martin, and Wyant, had been acclaimed as American originals, and the source of their power recognized as originating in their native soil. Theodore Roosevelt, a passionate outdoorsman and lover of nature, who would become president in 1902 and fervently promote American exceptionalism on the world stage, grasped the heart of the matter in an 1894 essay when he wrote that the key to American uniqueness came, not by the imitation of foreign styles, but in the cultivation of originality. "It is precisely along the lines where we have worked most independently that we have accomplished the greatest results; and it is in those professions were there has been no servility to, but merely a wise profiting by, foreign experience, that we have produced our greatest men.... On the other hand, it is those professions where our people have striven hardest to mould themselves in conventional European forms that they have succeeded least."[86] It is not a little ironic that, on the eve of the twentieth century, the gentle and intimate voice of the Tonalist landscape—though evolving greater expressionist power—should have been enlisted to trumpet the cause of America's coming-of-age as a cultural force in its own right.

Roosevelt, a straightforward individualist, was a paragon of Charles de Kay's ideal of individuality and originality, if not self-invention. Both men were heartily echoing Ralph Waldo Emerson's plea of two generations earlier to cultivate all that was native and distinctive in the American experience and avoid slavish adherence to European models. It is the influence of the Transcendentalists, especially Emerson and Thoreau, that this history now turns, to an inheritance that constitutes the intellectual and spiritual wellsprings of the Tonalist aesthetic: the literary lingua franca for artists, critics, and their patrons alike.



CHAPTER SEVEN

The Transcendental Tradition and the Tonalist Landscape: Emerson, Thoreau, and Darwin—Elegiac Prophets for a Troubled Age

Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man? —Emerson, 1836[1]

Surely joy is the condition of life. —Henry David Thoreau, 1842[2]

There is grandeur in this view of life...from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved. —Charles Darwin, 1859[3]

I confess, without shame, that I am sick and tired of fighting—its glory is all moonshine; even success the most brilliant is over dead and mangled bodies, with the anguish and lamentations of distant families, appealing to me ... for sons, husbands, and fathers ... it is only those who have never heard a shot, never heard the shriek and groans of the wounded and lacerated ... that cry aloud for more blood, more vengeance, more desolation.

—William Tecumseh Sherman, 1865[4]

Before turning to the decades after 1900 in chapter 8 and the apotheosis of the Tonalist movement, it is worth pausing to reflect on just what it was that made the Tonalist landscape so essential—in effect, the signature motif of turn-of-the century America—and, as the following chapter will further demonstrate, an art so ingrained in the American psyche by 1900 as to form the fissionable core of the American belief system, which in turn would brand a distinctive type of abstract American modernism in the twentieth century. It is the story of how Tonalism helped bridge the chasm of suffering, the trauma of four years of hellish fratricidal civil war, by embodying the ecstatic joy of Emerson and Thoreau in landscape imagery, Inness's indefinable and invisible—that appealed as much to the spiritual sense as the aesthetic. In the decades before 1900, Tonalism was inextricably linked to a broad spectrum of changes in American culture—economic, social, cultural, and religious. Paradoxically, Tonalism was both an avatar of change and an antidote to the very forces of change that brought about the emergence of the style in the first place. On the deepest level of the individual's existential needs and adaptive strategies for coping with public and private anxieties, Tonalism expressed a profoundly spiritual reconciliation with the exceptional pace of change that was transforming American life at every turn. The Civil War bludgeoned the psyche of the nation in ways a twenty-first-century mind likely finds hard to grasp. Traditional religion, already under fire from reform movements and the Darwinian revolution in science, was further pressed to reconcile the ghastly death toll. In addition, as America made the transition from a rural, agricultural way of life to an urban, industrial, and highly diverse society—with all the tensions and disruptions of a largely unregulated boom-and-bust economy—the development of a spiritualized landscape art offered answers, or at least consolations, of a kind: Tonalism represented a quasi-religious adaptation to the fraught emotional climate and fast-changing circumstances of the era. In effect, Tonalism adapted an existing landscape tradition, infusing it with a progressive stylistic flair and poetry, drawing upon the joyous and sometimes somber spirituality of the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Charles Darwin, too, would leaven the mix by the 1880s, his theory of evolution raising as many questions as it answered. The elegiac nature of Tonalism's near-at-home imagery, the fin-de-siècle nostalgia for a return to a better and more innocent world of nature, was reflected in the migration of city dwellers to country retreats, the building of urban parks, the preservation and creation of vast wilderness preserves, and the first stirrings of the environmental movement. All of this came out of the horrors of the Civil War.

OPPOSITE: Birge Harrison. *Silence*, c. 1890 (detail of fig. 7.50.1).

Tonalism and the Traumas of the Post–Civil War Era

It is difficult today to even begin to appreciate the extent and enduring trauma of the slaughter that took place between 1861 and 1865, during the American Civil War (fig. 7.1). The estimated casualty count of 620,000 is equal to that of all of America's foreign wars before Vietnam. A comparable casualty rate, about two percent in today's terms, would amount to six million fatalities.[5] What is hard to fathom is the cumulative impact of such unprecedented death rates, which were far beyond what anyone had imagined at the opening of the conflict. And these deaths occurred not thousands of miles away on distant continents, but on American land, on nearby battlefields, on American farms, in places with familiar names. These were deaths of fellow countrymen who spoke a common language and shared a common culture—literally, brother

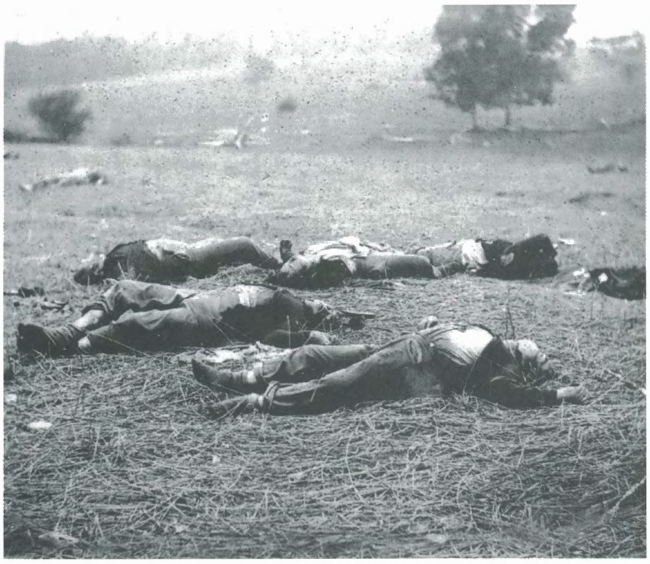


Fig. 7.1. Civil War dead on Gettysburg battlefield, 1863. Library of Congress.

fighting brother. They were horrific deaths, brought about at close quarters by the use of concentrated rifle and artillery fire, mechanized deaths that left bodies in tattered masses of decomposing flesh, many unrecognizable even to comrades. The deaths came in such numbers and with such ferocity, as bodies were dismembered, bludgeoned, annihilated, and scattered, that tens of thousands of souls were simply lost and remained unaccounted for; even years later, the circumstance of death and the bodies' final resting place remained a nagging, painful mystery to loved ones. This close-at-hand butchery left searing images in the minds of the survivors that were emblazoned in the public consciousness by unsparing newspaper accounts and in grisly, widely published photographs of the contorted and bloated dead of the battlefields.

In a culture that knew death firsthand, "the harvest of death" brought about by war was not just categorically different from the expected, it flew in the face of reason and common decency and belied the most cherished hopes and beliefs of traditional religion. Shattered were the expectations of a "good death" surrounded by family. Tens of thousands died of dysentery and its complications; tens of thousands more suffered the effects of sickness and wounds for the rest of their lives, many dying slow, crippling deaths. Unimaginable and gruesome death came to tens of thousands of doorsteps—and with it, unanswerable despair. The sense of purposelessness, desecration, and blind evil was inescapable: nearly 24,000 dead and wounded were strewn across the beautiful pastures and farmlands of Antietam: 35,000 dead and wounded at Gettysburg. Death and loss were like a miasma—few families escaped, fewer still went untouched. The horror persisted in the collective memory of the millions who had served, lingering at every turning point of life, infecting every moment of conscious speculation on the meaning of life, especially in those times of solitude and quiet when memory and wonder echoed with voices of lost friends and loved ones, of hopes and joys obliterated.

This "republic of suffering," as the landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted described a Union hospital ship, epitomized an America changed forever. As the full extent of the shocking body count took root in private and public consciousness following 1865, the nation sought out new ways of coming to terms with death on such an unprecedented scale. This cataclysm produced something of a cultural disharmony: on the one hand, an official cult of mourning celebrating the noble sacrifice of millions; and on the other, a private rendering of grief that, as likely as not, was inconsolable by traditional formulas of amelioration, leading to attitudes of acerbic skepticism and ironic distancing from public demonstrations of patriotism and sentimental effusions of glorious sacrifice. The public-private split can be found in President Abraham Lincoln's mellifluous consecration of the battlefield at Gettysburg, couched in the rhythms of Old Testament certitude, and in the candid naturalism of Walt Whitman's poetry of the war: "The living remain'd and suffer'd, the/Mother suffer'd/And the wife and the child, and the/Musing comrade suffer'd/And the armies that remain'd suffer'd."[6]

The suffering that Whitman knew in the Washington hospitals filled with the wounded and dying changed him utterly, so much so that he spent the rest of his life reworking parts of *Leaves of Grass* to accommodate his sojourn in a national hell. Something of what Whitman experienced irrevocably altered America and its art.

America's belief system had been under renovation for decades by 1861; writers and religious thinkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry Ward Beecher, rejecting the dry abstractions of their Calvinist antecedents, had all been advocating a more practical and heartfelt sensibility, one more in concert with American realities and spiritual needs. But as historian Drew Gilpin Faust has written, this slow reformation of spirituality was shattered and then hastened along in new directions by the ceaseless body counts of 1861–65. "Into this environment of cultural ferment, the Civil War introduced mass death. For an increasingly humanitarian age, such suffering could not help but raise disturbing questions about God's benevolence and agency. But this was more than an abstract intellectual issue for the hundreds of thousands of Americans bereaved by the war. Loss demanded an explanation that satisfied hearts as well as minds."[7] Within twenty years of the war's end, volumes of Emerson and Thoreau would become almost as common on the bookshelves of New England and New York households as the Bible.

In the aftermath of the Civil War carnage, the nation was swept by various religious impulses as the bereaved became desperate to make sense of the cataclysm that had befallen them,

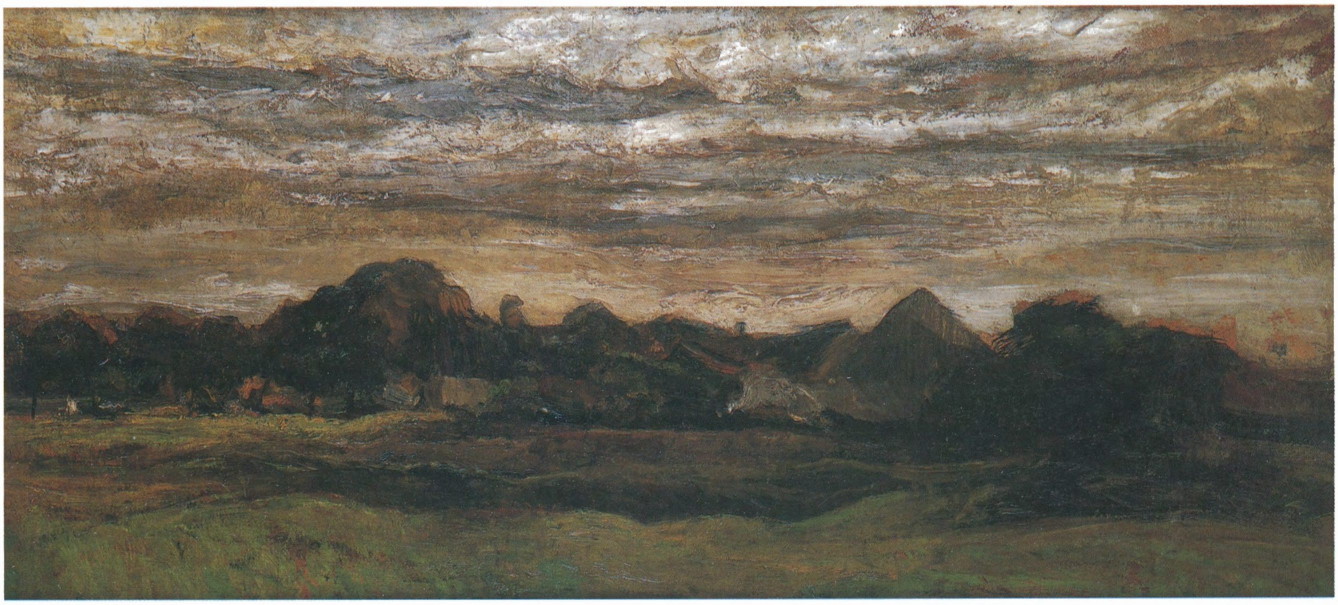


Fig. 7.1.1. Joseph Frank Currier, *Munich Landscape*, 1880. Oil on paper laid down on canvas, 25⅜ x 54¹⁵⁄₁₆ in. Courtesy Menconi & Schoelkopf Fine Art, LLC.

to either explain or justify the inexplicable or the unjustifiable. After 1865, as historian James H. Moorhead has shown, there was "a muting of the 'negative images traditionally associated with life's end.' A new eschatology that influenced nearly all of Protestant thought 'sought to narrow the distance between this world and the next, even to annex heaven as a more glorious suburb of the present life.'"[8] This narrowing of the material and spiritual world was central to the doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) and his American adherents, and factored greatly, as has been seen, in the art of George Inness. Henry Ward Beecher, a great supporter of Inness, adjusted his strict Calvinist outlook to allow a broader, near pantheistic understanding of humankind's lot, and by the 1880s even employed Darwinian metaphors in his preaching and writing about nature. Beecher saw art as reflecting man's spiritual nature, and noted how the artist gloried in the symbolic language of landscape. In 1860 the artist George Inness, a fervent supporter of the abolitionist cause, retreated to Medfield, Massachusetts, near Boston, where he was caught up in the war fever; then in 1864 he relocated to Eagleswood, New Jersey, a community dedicated to Swedenborgian ideas. The spiritual torment of these war years as the casualty toll mounted, and the move to Medfield and later Eagleswood, both resulted in changes to Inness's art. As Inness scholar Michael Quick has pointed out, in Medfield Inness began to paint with more vigorous brushstrokes, a style that gave his landscapes energy and movement; while at Eagleswood, where he was converted to the Swedenborgian faith by William Page, Inness produced paintings with greater harmony and balance—a response to new doctrines, perhaps, but also a retrospective calm after the terrible killing of the previous years.[9] Beecher's friendship may have additionally strengthened Inness's Swedenborgian enthusiasm for elucidating the correspondences between the material and spiritual realms, where the forms, colors, and symmetries found in nature speak directly to the soul. In the aftermath of war, with the tragic cost of victory registering in every heart, especially in abolitionist circles, such feelings would have found increasing resonance for Inness. Spiritualist ideas, too, abounded in postwar America—Mary Todd Lincoln spent the remainder of her life trying to communicate with her dead son, and Swedenborgian concepts of the nearness of heaven to everyday reality provided soothing comfort to many, but not all.

For many Americans the war dead were never far from their thoughts, whether in bitter memory of the slaughter, inhabiting some nearby spiritual realm beyond the veil, or prompting a more edgy and sullen ironic take on the nothingness of life against the backdrop of near-suicidal genocide. Among artists, writers, and thinkers, sanctimonious glory vied with private despair, and popular sentimentality jousted for advantage with the sometimes dark yet glittering integrity of individual sentiment: the realm claimed in the cadenced prose of Emerson and Thoreau, in the contemporary voices of Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Walt Whitman, Stephen Crane, Henry James, and William Dean Howells, and the pragmatism of William James and Oliver Wendell Holmes. In progressive circles, speculation about heaven and hell had given way to more immediate concerns. New claimants on the imagination emerged in the form of Darwinian conjecture on human descent. Nature, the nearby landscape—the world as it is, with photographs of the grotesque dead sprawled across once serene pastures seared into so many minds—was imprinted with hopes, both somber and serene. Whitman, the poet of body and soul, who had witnessed the carnage firsthand as a

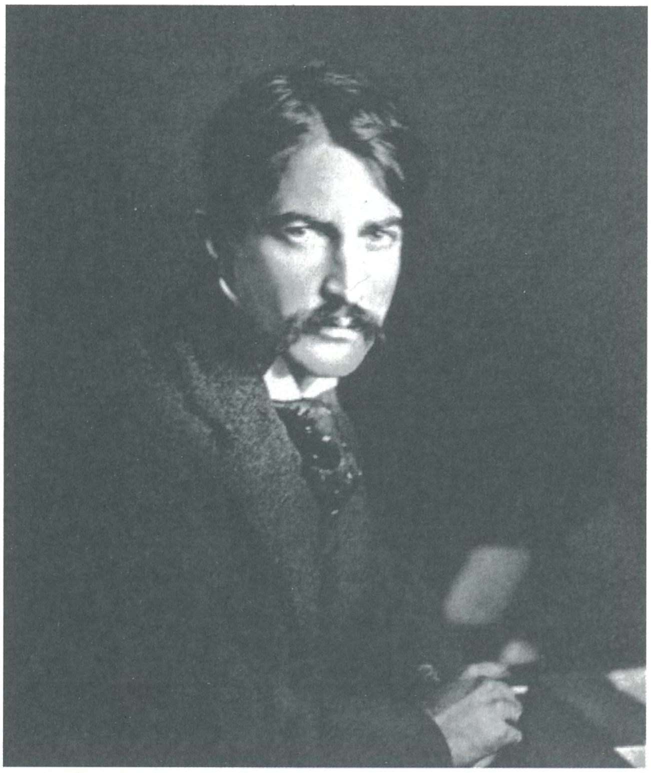


Fig. 7.2. Stephen Crane, undated photograph.

nurse to the wounded and dying, could never think of nature the same way again: nature was haunted by death. Stephen Crane (fig. 7.2), born in 1871 and close in age to many in the primary generation of Tonalists, wrote the first psychologically accurate portrayal of the Civil War, based entirely on secondhand reports and photographs. Nature, in the pastures and woodlands of Sullivan County in the Catskill Mountains, that he knew intimately as a youth, was forever tempered in his imagination to accommodate the reality of indifferent slaughter on the battlefields of the South.

In Crane's novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, this transition from a gentle nature of peace to one contaminated by senseless slaughter is made dramatically clear. The book's nameless young protagonist escapes from the battle to seek refuge in a nearby forest enclosure: "So, he went far, seeking dark and intricate places... It seemed now that nature had no ears... This landscape gave him assurance. A fair field, holding life. It was the religion of peace. It would die if its timid eyes were compelled to see blood. He conceived nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy." The youth throws a pinecone at a squirrel, which scampers away, confirming for him nature's reluctance to countenance conflict... but only for a few minutes more. "At length, he reached a place where the high, arching boughs made a chapel. He softly pushed the green doors aside and entered. Pine-needles were a gentle brown carpet. There was a religious half light. Near the threshold, he stopped horror-stricken at the sight of a thing. He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a column-like tree... The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was opened. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the grey skin of the face ran little ants... Again, the youth was in despair. Nature no longer condoled with him... there was given another law... all life existing upon death, eating ravenously, stuffing itself with the hopes of the dead." With this Darwinian epiphany, of nature red in tooth and claw, Crane's protagonist returns to the battle—changed: "The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him. It complexities and powers, its grim processes, fascinated him. He must go close and see it produce corpses."[10] Crane's fictional recognition of indifferent death in nature, incorporating a grim Darwinian interpretation of the law of the survival of the fittest, which turns battle itself into a natural machine for producing corpses, reflects the disillusionment of the author's generation and a subtle but all-pervasive melancholy that affected even the most serene responses to the natural world. The American landscape had been bloodied and those living in the Civil War's aftermath could never see the landscape with the same innocence as before.

For the New England elite in particular—with its love-hate relationship with the abolitionists (whom they blamed for the conflict)—the war proved devastating to the faith of their fathers. New England's husbands and sons had taken more

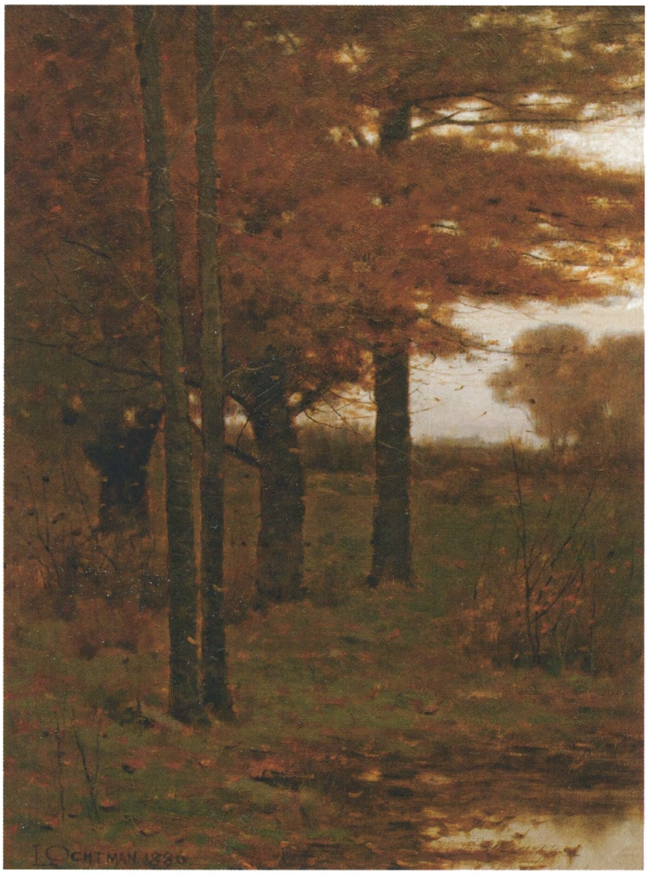


Fig. 7.2.1. Leonard Ochtman, *White Pines at Dusk*, 1886. Oil on canvas, 16 x 12 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

than their fair share of the casualties. The blood and carnage did insidious damage to the intellectual order as it had once existed. Cynicism, irony, disrespect for authority—especially the attitudes of the young soldiers toward those who had not been there or who had shirked the fight—was rampant. In educated circles the war fostered a faltering faith in individual human agency, scorn for bombastic and false feelings, and a kind of stoic detachment from life. The failures of Reconstruction and, later, the imposition of Jim Crow laws in the South and the horrific lynching of blacks only darkened the picture. The contemporary writer and scholar Louis Menand has written movingly of the life of the great jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was wounded three times in battle, suffered the loss of beloved friends, and saw the worst of the slaughter at close range, and with it the smashed hopes of a lost generation: "To many of the men who had been through the war, the values of professionalism and expertise were attractive; they implied impersonality, respect for institutions as efficient organizers of enterprise, and a modern and scientific attitude—the opposites of the individualism, humanitarianism, and moralism that characterized Northern intellectual life before the war."[11] The war changed Holmes as it changed America. Menand portrays this change through the lives of many in the intellectual establishment, how disillusionment led to the formulation of new adaptive arguments for changed realities: the philosophy of pragmatism—the end game of war's horror and futility. As Menand describes it, pragmatism was a modernist adaptation to American needs, less an idea than "an idea about ideas. They all believed that ideas are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but are tools—like forks and knives and microchips—that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves. They believed that ideas are produced not by individuals, but by groups of individuals—that ideas are social. They believed that ideas do not develop according to some inner logic of their own, but are entirely dependent, like germs, on their human carriers and the environment. And they believed that since ideas are provisional responses to particular and irreproducible circumstances, their survival depends not on their immutability but on their adaptability. The belief that ideas should never become ideologies—either justifying the status quo, or dictating some transcendent imperative for renouncing it—was the essence of what they taught."[12]

Such skepticism and pragmatism was, in Menand's judgment, a coping system formed in the crucible of war and its aftermath, which framed and then shaped the intellectual outlook of the postwar generation. As will be seen in chapter 8, much of the American criticism of European art in the Armory Show of 1913 was a reaction against foreign ideology or "isms" displayed in art, especially in an overt or narrative form. American reluctance to enter into World War I reflected an underlying leeriness of becoming involved in European ideological conflicts as well as another round of bloodletting—such was the lingering distaste prompted by the unquiet memories of the Civil War. In a sense, the Civil War reenergized an underlying Puritan iconoclasm, initially galvanized by James McNeill Whistler, that led to the gradual dismissal of narrative and figuration in preference for simplification of form, especially in painting and the decorative arts. Together, Tonalism and the Arts and Crafts movement revolutionized the look of late-Victorian America. On many fronts in America's cultural life, idealism, embodied in the writings of Emerson, first vied and then merged with more materialist outlooks influenced by Charles Darwin's account of natural selection; this disjunction and accommodation of past and present, idealism and realism, provided much of the frictional heat of the age. As irony entered the language and consciousness of England after the fruitless wholesale slaughter of World War I, a melancholy irony began to flourish in post–Civil War America in the voices of Emily Dickinson, Ambrose Bierce, Mark Twain, and most assuredly in Stephen Crane's fiction. And behind so many artists and writers lay the resonant New England twang of the most subtle ironist of all, Henry David Thoreau.[13]

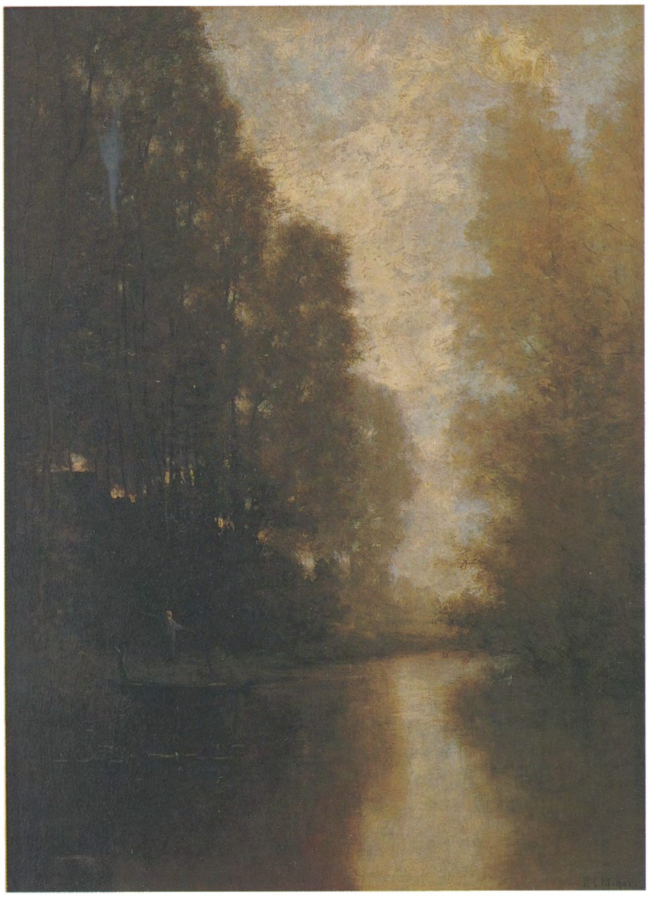


Fig. 7.2.2. Robert Minor, *Reverie*, c. 1880. Oil on canvas board, 16 x 22 in. Private Collection.

This ironic skepticism and detachment, this receptivity to modernist impulses, especially the growing attraction of Darwin's ideas, provided much of the emotional temperament of New England from the 1870s on, the climate in which Tonalism first flourished. It partly explains why the Hudson River School with its sometimes bombastic sentimentalism never found a foothold in Boston, and why, when New England literary and critical culture began to flourish in New York in the late 1870s, the Gilder circle and the critic Charles de Kay demanded sentiment (deep tragic feeling) but scorned the falsity of sentimentality. It explains why the Pre-Raphaelite artists made little headway in Boston, and why their adherents in New York came under critical fire by 1880: English taste had not recently undergone the shock of hellish civil war, and so retained a lingering Victorian sweetness and sentimentality that had relatively few followers among progressives on this side of the Atlantic. It is why the modernist inclination toward non-narrative abstraction, uncertainty, mystery, and symbolic utterance took such early root in America, almost two decades before it appeared in England. Whistler, the avatar of this modernist outlook in America and Europe, did not fight in the Civil War, but his brother, a doctor, almost lost his life in the fighting, and his mother's family was permanently uprooted from home and past. A second-generation Tonalist like Charles Warren Eaton often returned to one of his earliest memories of childhood: watching the passing funeral train bearing the body of the slain Abraham Lincoln. The shadow of the Civil War lingers in the Tonalist landscape, which reflected the era's skeptical disenchantment with life. Tonalist artists sought to reendow nature with a new profundity by transcribing their mixed feelings of joy and despair onto canvas, not in a portrayal of the grandiloquent realms of heaven intimated in the vast panoramas of the Hudson River School, but by the reenchantment of the intimate confines of the near-at-home landscape. They imbued the known with vital spiritual force and an often aching nostalgia for a past that the horrors of war had driven out of the world. In effect, the Tonalists sought to turn back the clock for Stephen Crane's disillusioned young soldier and return to him and the nation a nature that still "condoled." This was an art for a tough new breed disillusioned by the old shibboleths, men like Oliver Wendell Holmes, who is reported to have said late in life, "[A]fter the Civil War the world never seemed quite right again"[14] The work of J. Francis Murphy from the 1880s depicting peaceful farm settings (for example, *Hillside Farm*, 1885; see fig. 4.62), points to the growing popularity of such bucolic subjects, often cloaked in classical allusions harking back to a mythical golden age that the war had destroyed.

Tonalism provided a visual exemplar of a world put right. It celebrated a non-narrative vision of enduring grace in the face of thousands of lives abruptly snuffed out, their remains unidentified or lost forever. Never before or since, as Drew Gilpin Faust has pointed out, had the country been confronted with such wrenching existential questions: "This crisis of knowledge and understanding extended well beyond the problem of the unidentified dead to challenge, in Melville's words, 'the very basis of things.' Individuals found themselves in a new and different moral universe, one in which unimaginable destruction had become a daily experience. Where did God belong in such a world? How could a benevolent deity countenance such cruelty and such suffering? Doubt threatened to overpower faith—faith in the Christian narrative of a compassionate divinity and a hope of life beyond the grave, faith in the intelligibility and purpose of life on Earth. Language seemed powerless to explain, humans unable to comprehend what their deaths—and thus their lives—could mean."[15]

Tonalism: A Spiritual Vision for a Material World

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle, as with companions, and as holding the
hands of companions....

—Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in
the Dooryard Bloom'd," 1865

From the perspective of the post–Civil War crisis of faith, Tonalism can be properly understood as a landscape art offering a symbolic storyless poetics that was, nevertheless, marked by a certain elegiac nostalgia for a vanishing and more innocent past: a faith at once traditional and modern and resolutely stoic. (J. Francis Murphy even gave the title *Tints of a Vanished Past* [Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville] to a landscape of 1884 showing an abandoned homestead replete with broken fences and a derelict well.) Viewed from an evolutionary standpoint, the Tonalist landscape was a cultural adaptation to a social need; it served as an antidote to a spiritual malaise by symbolizing life's inherent force—and nature's life-giving force in a vitalizing art form. By embodying such natural forces, as well as the ideas of change and metamorphosis popularized by Charles Darwin in the mid-nineteenth century, Tonalism tamed the more problematic and savage aspects of Darwinism, literally toning down the starker scientific realities of natural selection and integrating them into a more sanguine vision of the perennial cycles of life. These cycles of change, which contain both death and life, were translated by the artist into visual metaphors (especially the changing of the seasons in spring and autumn) that offer consolation even as they mirror inevitable loss.

It has already been noted how this evolution came about in formalist and institutional terms, as the Tonalist artists and the art world they organized to further the propagation of their work developed in the 1870s and beyond. Chapter 2 explored the ways in which the greatest preacher of his day, Henry Ward Beecher, made the transition from the unrelenting Calvinism of his upbringing and early ministry to a Christianity that stressed grace, individual freedom, and attentiveness to the creative needs of the soul, and a fostering of the well-lived life—a life of meaning and hope in the here-and-now, as opposed to the hereafter. Beecher's early support for the radical landscapes of Inness was part and parcel of this watershed in spiritual values, utterly rooted in the natural world, which he, and George Inness, were instrumental in promoting, and which the crisis of the Civil War further hastened. By 1882 at a testimonial dinner for Herbert Spencer, the English writer on social Darwinism, whom Beecher had been reading for twenty years, Beecher proclaimed his complete acceptance of Darwin's theory of evolution as interpreted by Spencer, merging it with his own liberal Protestantism. "It is the theory that man is first an animal, pure and simple, and that by the breathing of the breath of God into him there is the unfolding gradually of a rational soul, an intellectual capacity, a moral and spiritual nature...." Beecher closed by extolling Spencer for bestowing "thought that dispels the darkness that hangs over the most precious secrets of life, whoever gives me a confidence in the destiny of my fellow-men, whoever gives me a clearer stand-point from which I can look to the great silent One... [and so] emancipate that life from superstition, from fears, and from thralls, and make me a citizen of the universe."[16]

Beecher, like so many in his generation and the next, found in the emancipation of the slaves, achieved at such terrible cost, an echo in the emancipation of the mind and spirit. Behind Beecher loomed two more formidable literary voices, two essential and representative lives, which the changes wrought by the Civil War brought into dramatic relevance for the generation of artists born between 1840 and 1865: Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. The writings of Emerson and Thoreau and their Transcendentalist credo—and perhaps of equal importance, the way they led their lives—became templates for the elegiac idealism of individual worth, for which Tonalism provided a visualizing focus and near-devotional imagery. Even as late as the first decade of the twentieth century, in works like James Henry Moser's *Oaks at Dusk*, 1903 (fig. 7.3), one can detect the lingering trauma of conflict and its aftermath. Moser's foreground oak, the last of its sere leaves clinging tenaciously to its lower branches, would evoke for his aging generation feelings of loss, of losing ground, of the lone individual holding on and holding out against time's encroachments.

Tonalism and Transcendentalism: Emerson and Thoreau—Representative Lives for a Healing Nation

In the aftermath of war, America sought healing, not just in economic expansion but also in self-education, and above all in the development of a national culture and value system that would reunite the country. The New England mind as represented by Emerson, Thoreau, and their Transcendentalist offshoots, and the transfer of Boston's literary culture to New York, the epicenter of the postwar publishing boom, provided a rallying point for that cultural reconciliation: the New England mind became the intellectual currency of the realm, certainly the gold standard of the educated citizen. Above all, the postwar culture out of which Tonalism emerged was a bookish one: before radios, stereos, television, and the Internet, books were the not just the medium of entertainment, but of enlightenment and spiritual uplift. Before Freud and Jung and the development of radical psychological theories, just as the authority of traditional scripture waned, troubled minds turned increasingly to writers of philosophy, history, literature and poetry, and science for insight into existential issues. No one who has stumbled on intact turn-of-the-century libraries can fail to be impressed by the yards of volumes devoted to Emerson and Thoreau, the English Romantic poets, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Edgar Allan Poe, and the range of theological writings, along with the masterworks of Shakespeare, the histories of Edward Gibbon and Thomas Macauley, and the popular novels of the day. Books on natural history, botany, and popular science, and Darwinian speculations of bewildering plenitude by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer and his American follower John Fiske were also on the reading list of the cultural elites. *Scribner's Magazine* and, later, *The Century Magazine*, edited by Richard Gilder, offering articles by the finest writers of the day on the latest books, art trends, and scientific breakthroughs, could be found in every upscale household. The writer and historian Henry Adams (1838–1918, fig. 7.4), reflecting back on his boyhood and the family farm in Quincy, Massachusetts, outside Boston, noted the centrality of

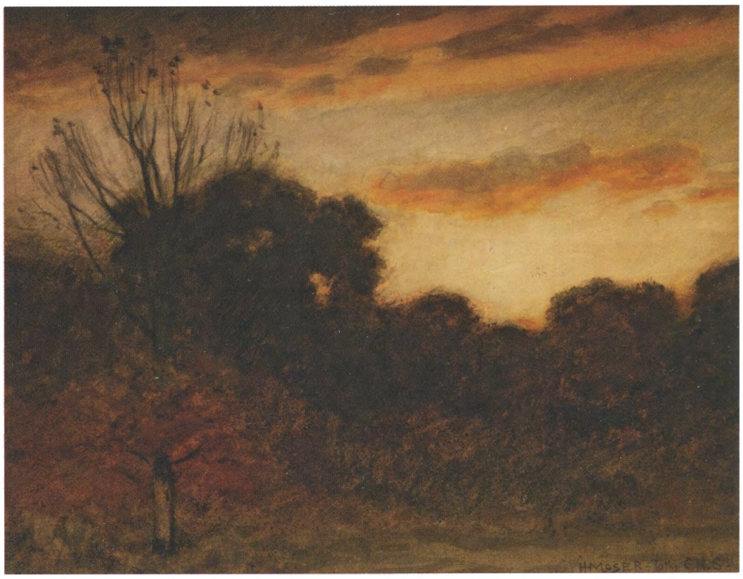


Fig. 7.3. James Henry Moser, *Oaks at Dusk*, 1903. Watercolor, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

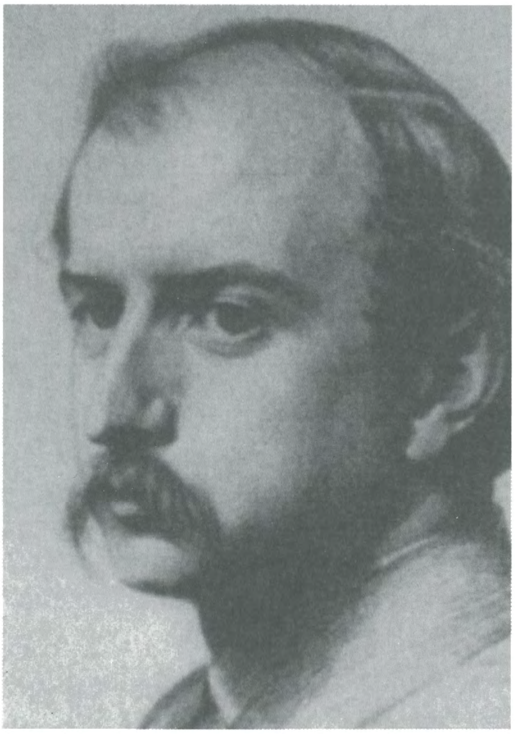


Fig. 7.4. Portrait of Henry Adams, 1868.

reading to New England's cultural life: "Books remained as in the eighteenth century, the source of life, and as they came out—Thackeray, Dickens, Bulwer, Tennyson, Macaulay, Carlyle, and the rest—they were devoured; but as far as happiness went, the happiest hours of the boy's education were passed in summer lying on a musty heap of Congressional documents in the old farmhouse at Quincy, reading 'Quentin Durward,' 'Ivanhoe,' and 'The Talisman,' and raiding the garden at intervals for peaches and pears. On the whole he learned most then."[17] Adams's association of books with youth, summer, and country smells and tastes, so reminiscent of Marcel Proust's alter ego in his garden at Combray, represents something of a universal experience. Such memories and their subjective associations with youthful idealism and the countryside infused the Tonalist landscape with much of its latent and enduring appeal.

For the Anglo-American Protestant majority in the decades around 1900, religion was less and less about denomination—and much less about institutions—and all about the written word, be it Scripture, philosophy, poetry, or the latest scientific controversies surrounding Darwinism. Religion became essentially a private matter, probably more so than at any time before or since.[18] Even before the Civil War wreaked such havoc with traditional religion, New Englanders like Henry Adams were slightly perplexed and chagrined over how little formal religious training had stamped their lives. "Of all the conditions of his youth which afterwards puzzled the grown-up man, this disappearance of religion puzzled him most. The boy went to church twice every Sunday; he was taught to read his Bible, and he learned religious poetry by heart; he believed in a mild deism; he prayed; he went through all the forms; but neither to him nor to his brothers or sisters was religion real. Even the mild discipline of the Unitarian Church was so irksome that they all threw it off at the first possible moment, and never afterwards entered a church. The religious instinct had vanished, and could not be revived, although one made in later life many efforts to recover it."[19] Just as Adams wrote of his education, so the religious dynamic of liberal Protestantism changed dramatically after the Civil War. "The generation that lived from 1840 to 1870 could do very well with the old forms of education; that which had its work to do between 1870 and 1900 needed something quite new."[20] This generation, the Tonalist generation born between 1840 and 1865, drew much of their religious experience from the Transcendentalist and spiritualist literature of the day: artists, collectors, and critics found themselves, literally and figuratively, on the same page. The central reference points for this common cultural orientation were Emerson and Thoreau, leavened with a dose of the highbrow and sometimes shocking Walt Whitman and a touch of the more approachable John Greenleaf Whittier, while Darwin and the evolutionary ideology of Spencer and Fiske provoked deep reflection across all cultural divides. Such a liberal progressive mix of the traditional and new found its way seamlessly into the pages of *Scribner's Magazine* and *The Century Magazine* (the Century Club was this publication's intellectual engine room). *The Century Magazine,* published no fewer than seven articles on Emerson between 1879 and 1883, while Thoreau, too, entered the pages of the magazine by way of a major article on his life and work by John Burroughs in 1879, followed by innumerable poetic paeans to the Concord mystic and nature writer in the decades to follow. Quoting Thoreau became a lingua franca for the educated classes. Art reviews of exhibitions often made reference to analogous lines from contemporary poetry, or used descriptive metaphors drawn from the prevailing culture's interest in things spiritual. The commonality of cultural reference points among the intellectual elite of the day is striking.

Many voices assuaged the public need to grapple with postwar uncertainty, but none more pervasively, and persuasively, than Emerson and Thoreau. No two authors were more widely read, admired, and adhered to than these Concord poet-philosophers. By the 1880s, Concord had long been the start and finish points for the American literary pilgrim. In an uncanny way, Emerson and Thoreau embodied complementary images of the liberal Transcendentalist credo, which by 1900 had coalesced into an intuitive, near-mystical spirituality. Emerson was an august paragon of Romantic subjectivity; the younger Thoreau was more the rebel outsider and individualist. Together they brokered a distinctive subjective individualism in American art and letters, which over time became the spiritual lodestar of the Tonalist movement and progressive modernism in America. Artists were more drawn to Thoreau's scintillating, concrete metaphors of life lived close to nature, and his scrupulous scientific observations, often couched in painterly terms and intuiting an evolutionary understanding of man's rooted place in the natural world. If Emerson was revered as an advocate of self-reliance, subjective individuality, and independent thinking, Thoreau was admired for questioning the shams of society and for desiring the solitude of nature, where a genuine appreciation of higher values and revealed truths might be cultivated. In terms of the long tradition of American religious values, Emerson embodied the idealist way of intuitive insight into the realm of spirit; Thoreau typified the empirical or Lockean method of drawing from the sensory world of nature insights into the human soul. Central to both, as historian Leigh Eric Schmidt has framed it, was a Protestant impulse for "individual aspiration after mystical experience or religious feeling, the value of silence, solitude, and serene meditation, and the immanence of the transcendent—in each person and in nature."[21]

In this context, Tonalism around 1900 can be understood as a dynamic synthesis of the competing idealist and realist claims of American religiosity in the nineteenth-century. Tonalism drew on traditional Judeo-Christian sources and the progressive strains of Unitarian and Transcendentalist ideas, along with various spiritual and mystical outriders of a more popular and secular bent, and combined these with the overarching insights of Emerson and the earthbound epiphanies of perception mined by Thoreau. This radical visual synthesis embodied in Tonalism translated the facts of sensory experience into a mystical unity of mind and body, hand and eye, in which the material and spiritual became one. Tonalism, in essence, was a very American and pragmatic solution to an age-old spiritual conundrum. George Inness declared in 1882, "The paramount difficulty with the artist is to bring his intellect to submit to the fact that there is such a thing as the indefinable—that which hides itself that we may feel after it.... But God is always hidden, and beauty depends upon the unseen—the visible upon the invisible."[22]

Brokering America's Spiritual Dilemma: Tonalism and the Synthesis of the Idealist-Materialist Divide in American Thought

Stepping back in time for a brief review of Emerson and Thoreau's development in the antebellum years will demonstrate what an extraordinary synthesis of the idealist and empirical strains in American religious and philosophical thinking Tonalism would prove to be. Such a perspective will also show how and why this distinctive synthesis became so embedded in the American collective consciousness, how it was transformed by the Civil War, and how it has endured to the present day. Historically, Tonalism bridged an age-old—and ongoing—schism in American religiosity; it represented a new dynamic that drew equally on traditional and progressive forms of spiritual understanding. As Henry Adams might have understood it, Tonalism addressed the puzzle of declining interest in formal doctrine and creeds by finessing the dichotomy between the objective and subjective understanding of the universe and its laws. From this perspective, Tonalism can be understood as another in a long history of mystical expressions, often of an iconoclastic impulse, at the core of the Protestant tradition—a tradition that valued private experience, specifically regarding the interpretation of the Bible, which in turn led to a near-infinite variety of spiritual paths, all of which fostered introspection and self-examination as key modes to individual expression.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, as the period of religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening convulsed America, Protestantism, especially in New England, underwent a pattern of near-ceaseless evolution, spawning numerous sects, including Methodism, Mormonism, the Disciples of Christ, and the Unitarians. Alexis de Tocqueville was struck by this multiplicity of sects on his visit to the United States in 1831 and 1832: "There is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains greater influence over the souls of men than in America."[23] The Unitarians disavowed the harsher doctrines of Calvinism, dismissing predestination, along with the concept of the Trinity, in favor of a single godhead, seeing Christ's role as a model for humanity rather than as a divine emanation of God. This Unitarian simplification of the understanding of the divine followed in a long tradition of Protestant iconoclasm, which tended to downplay human imagery or narrative devices, stressing a more abstract understanding of the divine nature.

The impulse to simplification or purity of doctrine (and imagery uncluttered by narrative), as has been seen, played a significant role in the origins of the Tonalist landscape, in which the figure was rarely included for fear of distracting from both artistic goals and spiritual uplift. Emerson expressed this in his seminal essay *Nature*: "...for you cannot freely admire a noble landscape, if laborers are digging in the field hard by. The poet finds something ridiculous in his delight, until he is out of the sight of men."[24] In turn, by the 1830s and 1840s, the Transcendentalists, led by the likes of Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, and many others, broke with an already watered-down Unitarian orthodoxy in repeated attempts at further simplification, refining and tossing away worn-out credos and doctrines in an attempt to reach some elusive bedrock of spiritual purity. Much of this stemmed from the impact of German idealist philosophy and biblical higher criticism, which further diminished doctrinal and scriptural authority. An intuitive, subjective, mythological, and poetic understanding of Christ's message became common among

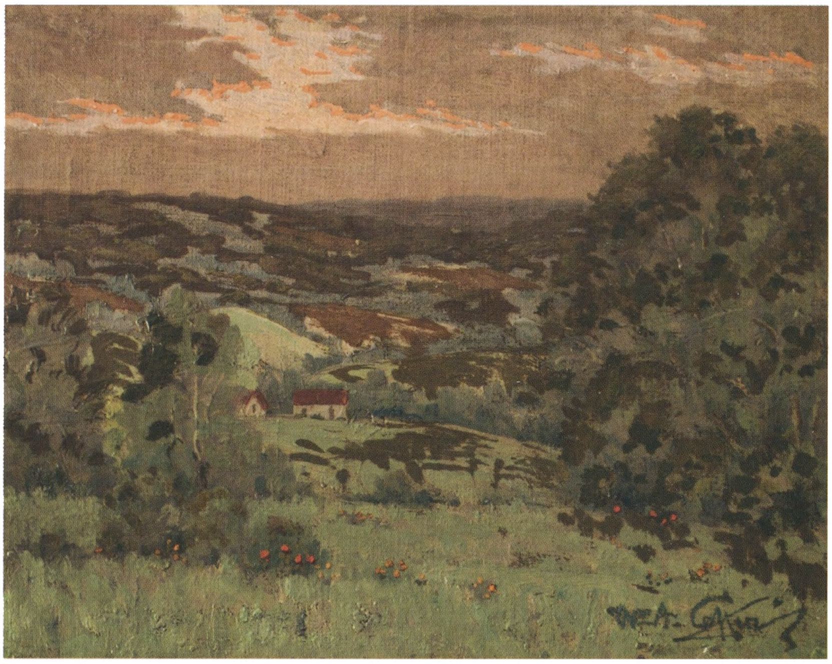


Fig. 7.4.1. William Coffin, *Sunset*, 1924. Oil on canvas board, 7½ x 9 in. Private collection.

Transcendentalist thinkers. In a larger sense, these antebellum reformers and thinkers were impelled by a deep spiritual need—the need to connect to both the divine and their fellow men—to jettison old world forms of religiosity and develop a peculiarly American religious consciousness that made sense for American conditions. Along more aesthetic lines, a generation later, the American Tonalists adapted European art forms, the techniques and stylistic affinities learned in Munich and Paris, to the American landscape.

In 1832, Emerson broke with the Unitarians when, as an ordained minister of the faith, he could no longer in good conscience administer the sacraments of Holy Communion to his congregation. Like other Transcendentalists, Emerson immersed himself not only in German theology and biblical higher criticism, which explored the origins of biblical texts and their historical context, and theology but also in the entire pantheon of German idealist philosophers and thinkers, as well as the English Romantic poets, and Hindu and Buddhist writings. Johann Gottfried von Herder—just one example—emphasized the mythical aspects of the biblical narrative, drawing from the traditional stories both poetical and imaginative insight, and ultimately rooting language itself in nature, an idea that runs throughout much of Emerson's writings.

The Transcendentalist movement as it evolved in the antebellum decades took much from European sources and further refined and adapted its message for American consumption. The impetus for reinvention and refurbishment among Transcendentalists, which was critical to the development of the New England mind, only magnified a fierce individualistic streak among its adherents, who tended to be scornful of creeds and even more so of those who maintained an uncritical adherence to tradition. This egocentric dynamic, which placed intuitive spirituality at the center of its outlook, tended to make many Transcendentalists skeptical of science and the empirical tradition of John Locke, which had weighed heavily in the Enlightenment and was so crucial to the thinking of founding fathers like Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Madison, and Hamilton. Regardless, the Transcendentalist impulse to discard inherited tradition for baseline values, for a vital and heartfelt religion, produced a dizzying array of spiritual movements, some mystical, some communitarian (Brook Farm being the most famous example) and reformist, especially in education, emphasizing the development of self-knowledge in children. It is hard to imagine the abolitionist movement—or the Civil War—without the spiritual forces of reformist Transcendentalism behind it.

Thoreau, an early follower and adherent of Emerson, proved to be somewhat of a corrective to the high-flown spirituality of Transcendentalism by anchoring his insights to what he could touch, see, hear, and imaginatively experience on his Concord doorstep. Thoreau tempered Emerson's deductive Platonism with a heady dose of Aristotelian hands-on experience and Lockean joy in the sensuous here-and-now, a dynamic admixture that would prove crucial to the Tonalist artists and devotees of Thoreau in the last decades of the century. In effect, Thoreau concluded that truth, where and when it was to be found, lay at the confluence of the material and spiritual realms, a most elusive penumbral boundary for even the best poets or artists to navigate. Tonalism's subdued light, the palpable atmosphere in which hard- and soft-edged forms jostle for our attention—their contours appearing and melting away and reforming—constituted an approximation of this mystical state of enhanced perception: the indistinct presence hovering at the edge of peripheral vision, in the shards of light and shadow littering an abandoned path; perhaps in the last flicker of sunset when landscape forms lose substance and turn into blurred diaphanous shapes against the coming twilight.

Like Inness, Thoreau determined from his unceasing investigations in nature that what we "know" is a distillation of spirit and matter, an empowering fusion of energy flowing from the interaction of memory and imagination. The act of perception—true perception, as Thoreau gleaned from Hindu religious teachings—unites the observer with the observed. Differences are obliterated. Individual and universal spirit is dissolved into one. Such ideas of mystical unity—a fragile synthesis of the underlying idealist and materialist impulses in the American character—provided much of the emotional backdrop to the development of Tonalism, a combustible admixture of spirit and matter alluded to by Thoreau in 1853 when pressed to describe what he was about: "The fact is I am a mystic—a transcendentalist—& a natural philosopher to boot."[25]

The historian Leigh Eric Schmidt, writing on the broad sweep of mystical spirituality in nineteenth-century America, lists the central elements of this movement, at their apogee in 1900, as follows: "Individual aspiration after mystical experience or religious feeling./The valuing of silence, solitude, and serene meditation./The immanence of the transcendent—in each person and in nature./The cosmopolitan appreciation of religious variety as well as unity in diversity./Ethical earnestness in pursuit of justice-producing reforms or 'social salvation.'/An emphasis on creative self-expression and adventuresome seeking."[26]

Even a quick perusal of Schmidt's points indicates an extraordinary match between the visual tropes of Tonalism and the spiritual impulses that generated the style. Charles Melville Dewey's celebrated painting *Return of the Hayboats*, circa 1892 (see fig. 6.28), one of the few Tonalist landscapes to include figures, does so only by reducing them to schematic ghosts, anonymous rowers engulfed by silence and solitude and a life steered by the rhythmic cadence of the tides. Such mystical expressions of unity with nature, in which the exquisitely modulated tonal paint marks echo the subjective mood of the creator—not unlike the poet's use of meter—became an artistic doctrine virtually codified by Charles de Kay (who was also a poet of Transcendentalist flights) and other critics in their reviews, and noted in countless verbal analogies in their descriptions of paintings. From this vantage point, George Inness's Swedenborgian faith in correspondences between the material and spiritual realm (a doctrine much admired by Emerson) seems very much in keeping with the temperament of the times and explains much of his popularity among collectors of the day, like Henry Ward Beecher, and especially those of a decided spiritual bent. The esoteric points of Swedenborgian theology expressed at the memorial service for George Inness held at the National Academy of Design in 1894 and related almost word for word in the *New York Times*, seems to have passed entirely without comment, as a Christian service would today. The gathered artists and dignitaries may or may not have found Swedenborg congenial, but his ideas, along with those of the Transcendentalists, were of such common currency as to form a kind of insider's argot among the artistically minded.

This cosmopolitan openness and appreciation of religious diversity is witnessed by the wholesale adaptation and appropriation of Asian modes of design, from James McNeill Whistler and John La Farge to Arthur Wesley Dow and his legions of students. La Farge, although a practicing Catholic who produced much in the way of traditional religious imagery over his career, was spellbound by Asian religion and art, seeking out artifacts in his travels to Japan and the South Seas, and places conducive to the mysticism and meditative raptures of the great Buddhist sages. Walt Whitman, writing in 1871, captured the centrality of mystical remove for human creativity when he exhorted "that only in the perfect uncontamination and solitariness of individuality may the spirituality of religion come forth at all."[27] These trends were expressed repeatedly in the criticism of Charles de Kay, for instance, when he questioned the aesthetic appropriateness of a crucifixion by Thomas Eakins, and a "modern" Madonna by Abbott Thayer in exhibitions of the Society of American Artists, or when he decried storytelling paintings or the insipid idealized nudes of Kenyon Cox. De Kay, echoing Emerson, emphasized America's youthful energies and cultural clean slate, and the overweening worth of the individual conscience, thus allowing its artists the luxury of drawing on a variety of sources and traditions to create a distinctive American aesthetic.

By 1900, thinkers from George Santayana to William James not only recognized the centrality of mystical spirituality to American life, but in many respects found it *the* distinctive by-product of nineteenth-century American religiosity, and a key evolutionary adaptation of liberal Protestantism to American realities.[28] For all his scientific objectivity and exposure to Darwinian ideas, James could not shake his belief in some spiritual realm beyond the reach of pure science, to which the human mind—that triumph of evolution—was gloriously attuned. Leigh Eric Schmidt has observed: "Between 1830 and 1900, American Transcendentalists and their likeminded heirs had created an ahistorical, poetic, essential, intuitive, universal, wildly rhapsodic mysticism."[29] In the same manner, drawing on the same literary and philosophical resources, and facing the same emotionally fraught changes and anxieties of a nation in ferment, the American Tonalists created their own visual equivalence of the experience of mystical spiritualism. And like their Transcendentalist literary counterparts in the antebellum years, the Tonalists had to first master the European tradition in art as they found it, and then apply it to the homegrown requirements—the spiritual and existential underpinnings of a life of equanimity and health—of a national culture still shaken by the cruelties of the Civil War. Over time, they shed worn-out European academic forms much as Emerson had shed them decades before, as he noted in the following journal entry about a fevered debate in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in which the participants had argued about the value of various "storehouses" of European knowledge: "'But as soon as we got ten miles out of town, in the bushes we whistled at such matters, cared little for Societies, systèmes, or bookstores.' There, he continued, 'God & the world return again to mind, sole problem,' to be solved by direct experience, not by reading 'whole Encyclopedias.'"[30]

Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Practical Idealism for the Well-Lived Life

It is difficult today to fathom fully the awed reverence Americans had for Emerson (fig. 7.5) and Thoreau by the turn of the century. For the generation that had endured the unspeakable losses of the Civil War, and the subsequent generation that experienced the war's aftermath, marked by social displacement, economic insecurity, and dizzying growth, and consequent disillusionment, Emerson and Thoreau embodied a certain homespun aura and nostalgia for simpler, carefree times. Bucolic Concord (fig. 7.6) was sought out by tourists, artists, and writers of every stripe. These Concord poets were America's first classic philosophers: in their pages could be found very American voices by which the soul might navigate the shoals of uncertainty and loss. Henry Adams remembered from his youth that Concord "glowed with pure light." For a man of the Enlightenment like Adams, Ralph Waldo Emerson represented an ideal American spirituality, to which he might aspire but forever fall short. "He [Adams] never reached Concord, and to Concord Church he, like the rest of mankind who accepted a material universe, remained always an insect, or something much lower—a man."[31] For the more subjective-minded, the sense of abiding life-shattering loss at the heart of Emerson and Thoreau's exploration of the human condition remained compelling and even life-changing. In the 1830s, Emerson endured the death of his first wife, two brothers, and his son; Thoreau his beloved brother, John, and then his sister, Helen. In both cases the trauma of loss impelled them to go their own way and develop an intuitive understanding of the ultimate conditionality of life surrounded by the nothingness of death. The received Christian doctrine based on sin, redemption, and resurrection simply lost emotional coherence. The landscape they knew and loved contained their dead and thus was hallowed beyond all measure. This was the only truth that mattered.

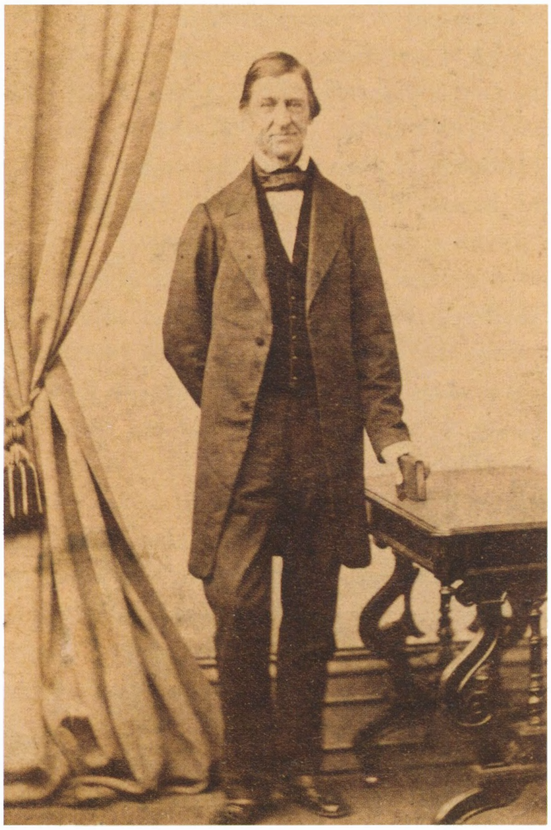


Fig. 7.5. Daguerreotype portrait of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Courtesy Concord Free Public Library.

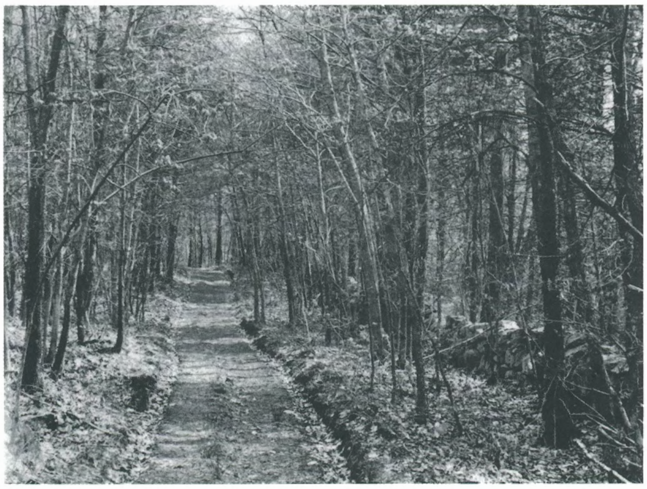


Fig. 7.6. Road through woods, Concord, Massachusetts, Herbert W. Gleason, c. 1906.

This, too, became the reality for many in the antebellum generation, especially among thinkers, writers, and artists. By the 1880s, Emerson's moral stance toward received religion—once radical—would have seemed only reasonable to many who had experienced similar trauma. For a worldly skeptic like Henry Adams, Emerson's religion of nature was a thoroughly sensible, if a bit conventional, religious stance. When Emerson could no longer believe in what he described as the Christian "scheme of redemption," which underpinned the importance of Holy Communion, he had resigned as minister of his

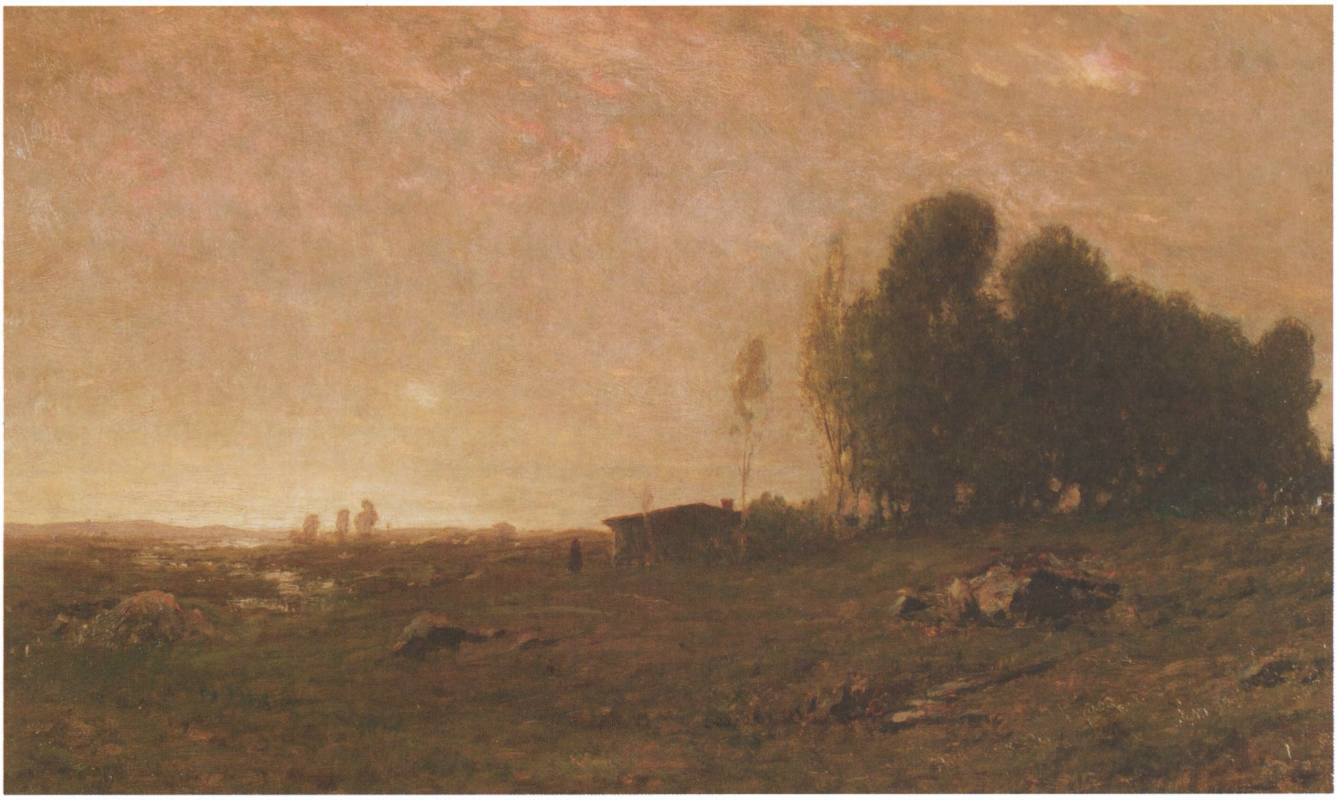


Fig. 7.7. Alexander Wyant, *The Cabin on the Ridge*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 12 x 20¼ in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

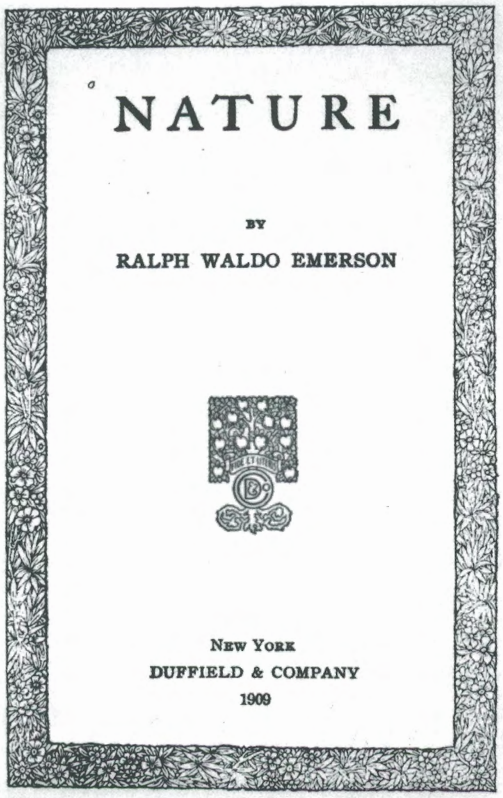
Unitarian church. The shock of his wife's death had forced him to reevaluate his religious views. Instead of the moribund forms of ritual and faith embodied in ancient European scriptural tradition, he turned to the world that he knew for a more vital source of meaning. As in so many things, Emerson's grief-stricken abandonment of traditional religion and his turn to both practical and mystical means of renewal prefigured the experience of a death-haunted generation after the Civil War.

In nature, Emerson found corresponding analogies for his very human needs: not just the good, and true, and the beautiful, the harmony and unity the poetic mind seeks, but analogous moral laws inherent in nature's physical laws. Such a Virgilian sensibility that finds death, too, in the pastoral landscape (*et in Arcadia ego*), manifest also in the Stoics and Ovid, fundamentally shaped Emerson's thinking. His stoicism was always cast in a hopeful light, as a very practical and upbeat—in a word, Yankee—solution to the ailments of life. He detected a vital new language in nature, the wellspring of spiritual solace, flowing from its underlying symbolic structure. For Emerson, such moral laws lay at very heart of nature and radiated to the far corners of the universe. Something of this revelation had come from his reading the English Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge, giving him a profound respect for the intuitive sense as a way to knowledge (much as the English artist John Constable had based his art of feeling in the fluid brushstrokes and the metamorphic energies of his cloud studies). Acts of direct perception, moments of deep cognitive insight—enlivened by the very real sadness of his personal life—led Emerson to value his personal intuition above a questionable theology, especially Scripture, which had its origins in a place and time very different from the world of early nineteenth-century America.

This personal and parochial adaptation to the realities of American life, a path followed by poets, artists, and creative people from all walks of life, would be rehearsed time and time again in the biographies of American genius. The keystone of this Emersonian solution almost always involved a practical, simple, and heartfelt question about the constituents of a well-lived life, while the answers were almost always near at hand, tangible, and immediately telling—in retrospect, hiding in plain sight. The perceptive naturalist, the poet, and the artist—the most acutely observant in society—were thus best placed, not just to reveal nature's truths but also to interpret and express them, and thus live them, in ways intensely individual and inimitably human. By the 1870s, artists like George Inness and Alexander Wyant were revered by their public precisely because of their mystical, even shaman-like commitment to art, as well as their ability to distill from landscape the inherent spiritual forces in nature. In so doing, they were considered sages of the visual world. Wyant's painting *The Cabin on the Ridge*, circa 1890 (fig. 7.7), for example, which describes a scene of near isolation, epitomizes the yearning for silence and release from cares, the very remove from the trials of civilization that has bewitched the city dweller from Wyant's time to our own.

Emerson's Natural Symbolism: A Stress on Symbolic Form over Narrative

Tonalism's gravitation toward non-narrative modes of symbolic abstraction was uncannily prefigured by the life and writings of Emerson. Like the many artists who followed in later decades, it was on a trip to Europe in 1833—which pre-dated his 1836 seminal essay *Nature*—that Emerson first grasped the principle that would change his life (fig. 7.8). He found himself enchanted by a natural history exhibition of plant life at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, which displayed the French botanist A.L. de Jussieu's system of natural classification. For Emerson it was a revelation; he found correspondences between man and nature everywhere. "Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in man the observer."[32] Emerson's fascination with natural science and the interconnectedness of all living things undergirded all his writings and kept his idealist speculations firmly based on the observation of real things. This practical and empirical streak was even more evident in his friend Thoreau, who explored every nook and cranny of his Concord environs in hopes of comprehending the interdependence of living things, and the spirit that infused them. It also explains why Emerson, like Inness, was so attracted to Swedenborg's "correspondential" relationship of nature to spirit, as interpreted through his first American disciple, Sampson Reed (1800–80). Reed was another very American mediator of idealist philosophy for American consumption, pointing out in his writings on Swedenborg the importance of material nature as a mirror, a metaphor or symbol of a spiritual state. Reed wrote that when man reached a truly meditative state of reflection on nature he would discover the language "not of words but of things." As a contemporary historian of Transcendentalism has observed: "Reed proclaimed a set of universal symbols that, when made apparent, allowed a more profound comprehension of the Creator than was possible through logically contrived dogma. To Reed, the genius of the age would be he or she who recognized that everything, 'whether animal or vegetable,' is 'full of the expression of that for which it was designed,' as a symbol of the infinite. 'The very stones cry out,' Reed exclaimed, 'and we do well to listen to them.'"[33] Inness and his Tonalist followers like Charles Warren Eaton were inevitably drawn to a spirituality that fostered such a dialogue with nature, a dialogue known well to children, aborigines, and most likely our Pleistocene ancestors. Eaton's *Rocks in a Field*, circa 1896 (fig. 7.9), is just one of many examples of the artist's preoccupation with large boulders, which he included in many of his watercolors, either in fields or along the seashore, rendering their craggy features with masterful understatement; many seem to have distinct personalities as they preside over their corner of creation, and a mystifying presence that obliged Eaton to give them voice in his art. Such an anthropomorphic view of nature was, of course, despised as infantile or worse by John Ruskin (the "pathetic fallacy"), but heartily embraced by Emerson: "The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood."[34] Tonalism's purity and simplicity of vision left little room for the imposition of distracting narrative: nature was left to speak for itself.



NATURE

BY

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
1909

Fig. 7.8. Title page of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay *Nature*, 1909 edition.

As the Tonalists drew on their experience of the landscape for a painterly language (plucking technical resources from the European academy), so Emerson was drawn to the natural world (influenced by his trip to Europe, and by Reed and Swedenborg) as a source for imagery and metaphor to describe the invisible powers behind the universe. In his essay *Nature*, Emerson tried both figuratively and literally to open the eyes of his contemporaries to the spiritual inheritance that lay all around them, using language to reveal the world anew to his readers: "... all natural objects make kindred impression, when the mind is open to their influence."[35] "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit."[36] What painters would not respond to such encouragement? Although drawing from German idealism, the subjective, intuitive vision of the English Romantic poets, and Reed's Swedenborgian correspondences, Emerson's essay was presented in matter-of-fact, show-me American terms:

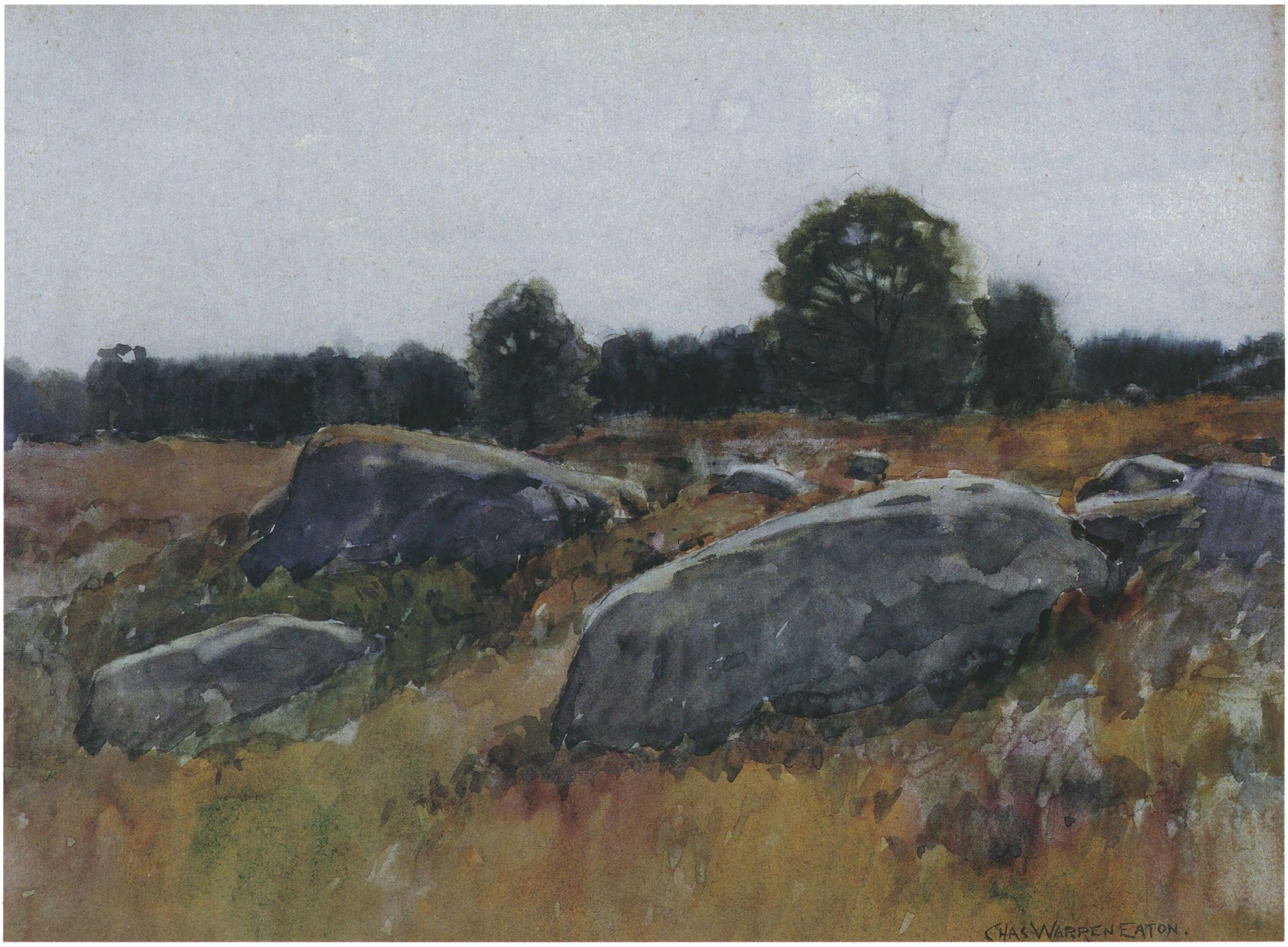

CHAS WARREN EATON.

Fig. 7.9. Charles Warren Eaton, *Rocks in a Field*, c. 1896. Watercolor, 11 x 14 in. Private collection.

1. *Words are signs of natural facts.*
2. *Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts.*
3. *Nature is the symbol of spirit.*[37]

Emerson then proceeded to spell out his argument. Since language evolved from nature, from an ancient poetic rendering of things in nature—one must go to the source: "The use of natural history is to give us aid in supernatural history; the use of the outer creation, to give us language for the being and changes of the inward creation."[38] Emerson's subjectivity went deeper still: he became convinced of a connection between the outward world of nature and the inner world of human thought and emotion, going so far as to posit a "secret sympathy which connects men to all the animals and to all the inanimate beings around him ... the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind."[39] Written before Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, Emerson's insights in *Nature* are remarkable avatars of what late-twentieth-century evolutionary biology has revealed about the deeply interlocking relationship between man and his environment. Such sympathies were a two-way street, as the English Romantic poets had discovered, for without the mind's ability to observe, register, and respond, nature's glories were a nullity. Emerson wrote, "There is not a passion in the human soul, perhaps not a shade of thought but has its emblem in nature."[40] This belief in an analogy between the human mind and nature—a nature replete with symbols that register in the mind because of the brain's common organic origin, which the theory of evolution would further elucidate for many in the decades after the Civil War—only stirred Emerson's fascination with the visible world and the designs he detected everywhere. "If a man should study the economy of a spire of grass, how it sucks up sap, how it imbibes light, how it resists cold, how it repels excess of moisture, it would show him a design in the form, in the color, in the smell, in the very posture of the blade as it bends before the wind."[41] Thoreau would bring Emerson's speculations full circle by implying that the act of perception itself was the first step toward a mystical unity of human beings with nature—a union that largely rendered narrative obsolete because subject and object had become one.

"Emblems in Nature": Pattern and the Tonalist Composition

It was precisely this lurking design in nature, occurring either in actuality or by virtue of the organizing compositional strategies or imposed unity of the artistic eye, that captivated so many of the Tonalist painters. In a very real sense, design and pattern became the central narrative of Tonalism, the armature of symbolic utterance that gave the style its dramatic and enduring appeal. Henry Snell, in *Lambertville across the Delaware*, circa 1905 (fig. 7.10), displays his mastery of just such embedded patterns. Seemingly a straightforward view of Lambertville, New Jersey, the real subject is the spellbinding design, the vertical and horizontal banding elements formed by the trees and the foreground, the middle ground river, and the distant river bank and dwellings; even the flattened paint marks offer delightful counterpoint variations on the overall grid pattern, both unifying and anchoring the composition, which approaches musical form in its fundamental abstraction. John La Farge, traveling with his friend John Adams wrote of his experience of Japanese art in 1886, echoing Emerson's understanding. "I have far within me a belief that art is the love of certain balanced proportions and relations which the mind likes to discover and to bring out in what it deals with, be it thought, or the actions of men, or the influences of nature, or the material things in which necessity makes it to work... lines and spaces are, in my belief, the first and earliest desires... these needs are as needs of the soul, and echoes of the laws of the universe, seen and unseen, reflections of the universal mathematics, cadences of the ancient music of the spheres."[42]

Such telling pattern structures, discovered in nature or at some later date, were re-created on canvas when residual memory, tempered by artistic judgment, seized on suggestive patterns, adjusting and highlighting landscape forms to conform to the imperative of the inner eye. The Tonalist canon is replete with examples. In Charles Warren Eaton's *Forest Glen*, circa 1900 (fig. 7.11), the simple patterns of tree trunks strike an emotional chord. The vertical and narrow composition emphasizes the mensurable spaces between the trunks, which seem to be both moving toward the observer and retreating, teasing the eye, which wants to clarify the meaning of the patterns, either to make visual sense of the recessional movement through space, or to decipher the more subtle and haunting rhythms that the patterns convey. Eaton later explored such motifs with more simplified decorative patterning—yet with infinitely more complex emotional impact—in his works featuring pine trees, executed after 1900, including his watercolor *Pines*, circa 1905 (see fig. 5.22), which achieves a masterful degree of abstraction by the cropping of the moonlit image to heighten and dramatize the silhouetted pines, a formal strategy that gives equal emphasis to the negative spaces between the trunks.

Inness, ever preoccupied with the unseen, had probably originated the motif with his spellbinding tree patterns in his paintings of Tarpon Springs from the early 1890s. For Inness—and much later, the postmodern Tonalist Wolf Kahn (see figs. 8.156–167)—the patterns of vertical tree trunks across a horizontal format offered similar formal possibilities in which the negative spaces, the interstices between the vertical forms, gain formal value in their own right, emphasizing enveloping space and the spiritualizing and unifying force of an encompassing atmosphere. The Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman (see fig. 8.142) also would be drawn to vertical tree forms early on, which in turn were transformed into his later "zip" paintings, featuring vertical color columns that attain almost complete abstraction. Certainly in retrospect, Tonalist technique, because it is particularly suited to elucidating patterns by virtue of its relatively monochromatic palette, seems tailor-made to exploit the felicities of Emersonian symbolism, as well as Thoreau's penumbral confluence of the material and spiritual.

Contemporary naturalist and poet Diane Ackerman, in an essay excerpted from her book *An Alchemy of Mind: The Marvel and Mystery of the Brain* (2005), suggests that the human need to discern patterns is rooted in our being: "Pattern pleases us, rewards a mind seduced and yet exhausted by complexity. We crave pattern, and find it all around us, in petals, sand dunes, pine cones, contrails. Our buildings, our symphonies, our clothing, our societies—all declare patterns. Even our actions: habits, rules, codes of honor, sports, traditions—we have many names for patterns of conduct. They reassure us that life is orderly."[43] Tonalist landscape imagery (especially early Aesthetic Tonalism), the armature of Emersonian forms, beguiles the eye because of the often

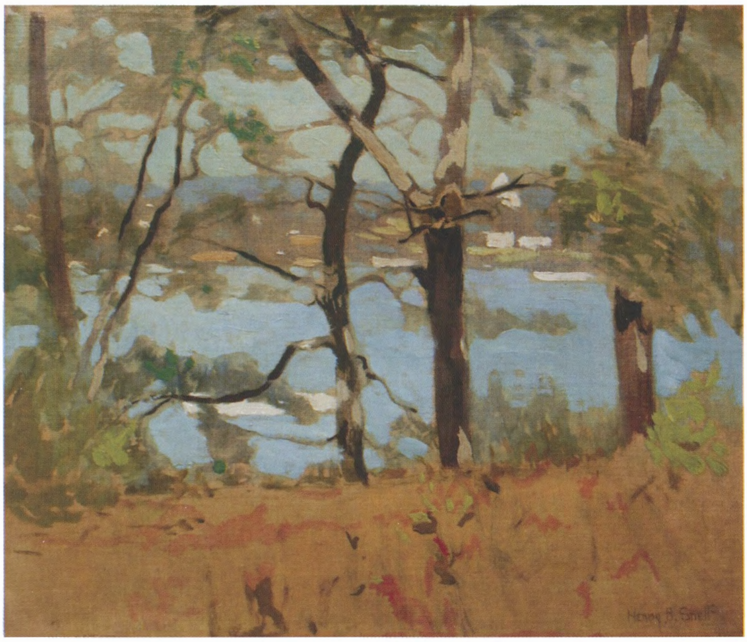


Fig. 7.10. Henry Snell, *Lambertville across the Delaware*, c. 1905. Oil on board, 12 x 14 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

subtle, or not so subtle, compositional patterns employed. Emerson worded it this way in the chapter called "Beauty" in his essay *Nature*: "First, the simple perception of natural forms is a delight. The influence of the forms and actions in nature, is so needful to man, that, in its lowest functions, it seems to lie on the confines of commodity and beauty. To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone...The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty."[44]

Oscar Wilde, an early champion of Whistler and the Aesthetic movement, who knew Emerson's writing well, hinted at what contemporary evolutionary biologists have theorized as being innate to the human brain when he wrote: "The art that is frankly decorative is the art to live with. It is, of all visible arts, the one art that creates in us both mood and temperament. Mere color, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becomes mirrored in the mind. The repetition of patterns gives us rest. The marvels of design stir the imagination."[45] Emerson's phrasing, like La Farge's "needs of the soul" and Wilde's description of pattern that "speak[s] to the soul," is derived from Old Testament sources describing man's "desire of the soul" (King James Bible: Isaiah 26:8), which in the nineteenth century was often interpreted in terms of the human need for rest, the balance between work and leisure and safety and security—and ultimately salvation in the sight of God.

Remarkably, modern research in evolutionary biology and related sciences has affirmed many of these intuitions by nineteenth-century artists and writers. Scientists have hypothesized that such "desires of the soul" were first embedded in the brain during the prehistory of man, when early hominids were intuitively drawn to savannalike landscapes in which the value of survival skills such as pattern recognition constituted adaptations to the environment. Awareness of pattern structures was key to survival in terms of danger warnings or propitious prospects. Cloud patterns might signal threatening thunder or the approach of needed rain, while changes or anomalies in the grasses and tree lines might be indicators of an approaching enemy or predator, or shady and hilly landscapes suited for food, shelter, and defense. The comforting recurrence of constellations of stars, properly analyzed and interpreted, provided signposts to direct hunter-gatherers to home ground and safety.

Recent advances in cognitive science and evolutionary biology have tended not only to substantiate Emerson's intimations that the human brain is genetically hardwired to recognize and respond to patterns—forms and symbols—but also to explain why symbolic patterns exerted such a hold on Tonalist artists: they needed to make sense of strong feelings that did not yield to easy, or then available, explanations. Plato had explained such deep-seated emotions as vague recollections of the world of ideal forms; Emerson and Thoreau attributed them to a shared biological dynamic with nature; Proust to the reemergence of memories from childhood; Jung to our collective unconscious; and Henry James to our *Binnenleben*, or hidden life: what he described as our "crepuscular depths of personality." The answers suggested by the most current scientific research offer clues not only to why the Tonalists were drawn to certain imagery but also to why the technical means of expression they evolved served their purpose so well.

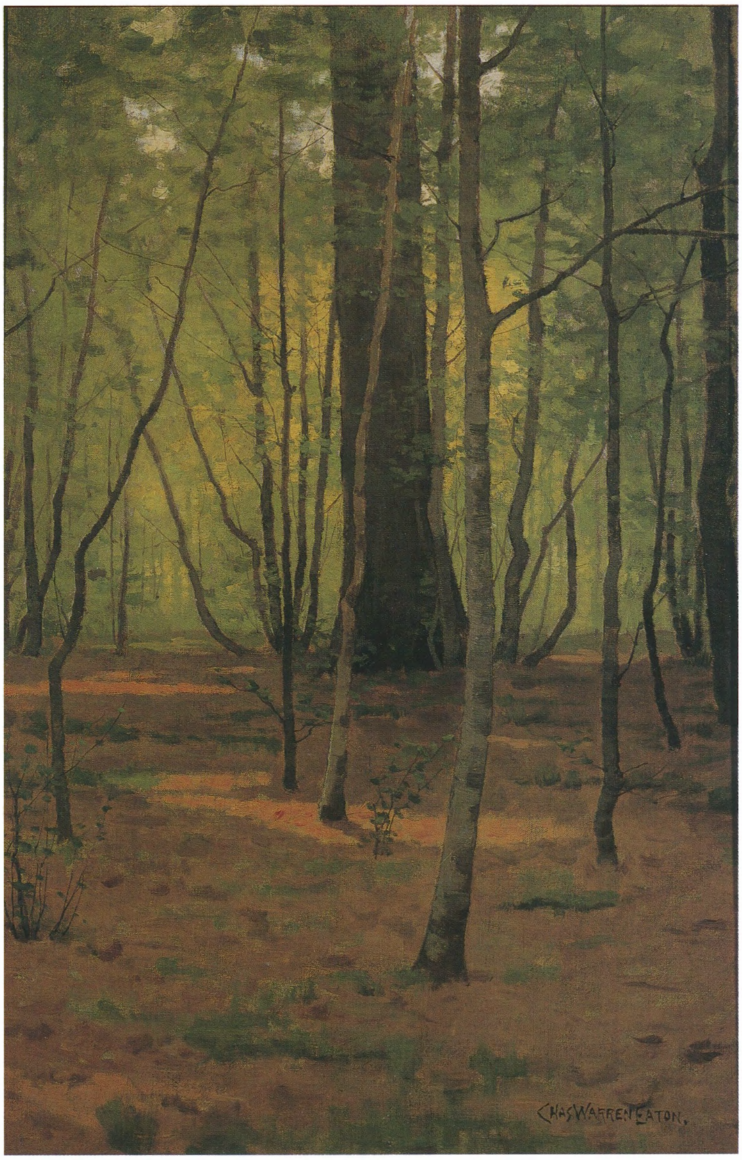

CHAS WARREN EATON.

Fig. 7.11. Charles Warren Eaton, *Forest Glen*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 22 x 14 in. Private collection.

The twentieth-century English cosmologist John D. Barrow has observed, "Perhaps the most basic of all is an ability to sense and classify patterns. This ability allows danger to be identified in the environment, past threats and opportunities to be recognized when they reappear, and patterns of events and collections of things to be classified. It is adaptive to seek out experiences that aid the process of classifying patterns in the environment. There is a broad class of structures, which we class as symmetrical, beautiful, or aesthetic, whose patterns are easy for us to grasp, and to which we might therefore expect to become disposed ... By regarding pattern-recognition as a type of game played against a potential environmental threat, we can see why we might expect our minds to be over-sensitive to the presence of patterns."[46]

There is a fascinating resemblance between the intimate Tonalist landscape and the ideal type of savanna landscape, which cross-cultural studies have demonstrated has an innate appeal across many ethnic groups, characterized by low grasses, shady trees, a source of water, and low hills offering wide views. Tonalist painters, by breaking with the traditional forms of landscape employed by the Hudson River School, allowed their intuitive feelings and innate predisposition to surface and guide them, and in so doing responded to and created the kind of landscapes our ancestors might well have found most congenial. These aestheticized landscapes, composed with pleasing patterns, replete with natural symbols—trees, rocks, ponds, green plants, worn trails and old roads—conferred often imponderable meaning and comfort to the viewer, the more haunting, mysterious, and strangely ambiguous because they touched on deeply embedded emotions that resisted logical explanation.

These proclivities for certain landscapes, for pattern and symbolization, and their religious or ritual associations have been pointed out by psychologist Steven Pinker, who have written about the inborn curiosity of man to probe the inner workings of nature, an instinct that seems imbedded in mankind's fundamental makeup. Pinker notes the advances in cognitive science that have identified what he describes as "untutored intuitions," functions of thought and emotion with which evolution has endowed the brain for survival. "They emerge early in life, are present in every normal person, and appear to be computed in partly distinct sets of networks in the brain." Pinker's list includes "[a]n intuitive version of biology or natural history, which we use to understand the living world. Its core intuition is that living things house a hidden essence [Inness's unseen] that gives them their form and powers and drives their growth and bodily functions."[47] In terms of the evolution of the brain itself, it seems that the capacity for symbolization and the organization of sensory data into interpretable patterns (grammar and syntax)—which makes language and art, as well as communication and the development of culture, possible—was the key feature in the evolution of human consciousness, allowing humankind the crucial leap forward from the other primates. Recent advances in neurobiology and the field of neuroaesthetics have substantiated what artists, philosophers, and scientists had long suspected: our brains are wired to differentiate between visual stimuli, with specialized parts of the brain dedicated to processing color (tones), form (symbols), and motion (vibration and refraction)—the key attributes of the Tonalist style (see intro p. xxiii). That these three aspects of visualization—there are numerous others—figure so prominently in the structure of the brain and were clearly adaptive in terms of human evolution, does much to explain the inherent appeal of the Tonalist style.[48] Thus, art—full of symbols and rhythmic patterns—is the crucible of our humanity.

As brilliantly intuitive as Emerson was along these lines, he tended to function on a higher deductive plane than Thoreau, who was more drawn to scientific inquiry and inductive reasoning. But Emerson's appeal to his contemporaries, and later generations of Tonalist painters, was precisely because his glittering generalizations reflected a common ground of shared feelings and unspoken longings. Emerson's insights, based on strolls in his garden among his pear trees and excursions roundabout Concord's bucolic pastures, woodlots, and riparian paths, inevitably move upward toward the general and abstract: "Nature is a language and every new fact one learns is a new word; but it is not a language taken to pieces and dead in the dictionary, but the language put together into a most significant and universal sense. I wish to learn this language, not that I may know a new grammar, but that I may read the great book which is written in that tongue."[49] Thus the artist's eye, for Emerson, was the instructed eye, sensitive to the most subtle variations and patterns in nature, the source, not just of joy, but the defining glory of man's humanity. Influenced by Kant's idealism, as well as advances in natural science, and his own experience of Quakerism convinced Emerson that truth was self-evident: an all-encompassing spiritual reality inherent in nature, and thus innate in man. "All visible things are emblems," wrote Thomas Carlyle (a friend and inspiration to Emerson) in *Sartor Resartus*, and nature itself is the "living visible Garment of God." Such an insight was certainly echoed by Herman Melville in *Moby Dick*, another instance in the literary sphere of the deep sensitivity to natural symbolism in late-Victorian America. This essential symbolic understanding of nature led to Emerson's central insight according to his biographer Robert Richardson: "The world itself is the great poem, the source of all the verbal approximations of itself. When the poet can hold fast to this connection, he has access—through his own poor powers—to the world's power and beauty... Not only did it never leave him (Emerson), it never lost its sweet urgency, its sensuous hold on him, its ability to lift the common moments of everyday life on the updrafts of awareness that readers are always wanting to call mystical experience. At the core of Emerson's life... is this willed surrender, this giving oneself over to the unregarded epiphanies of every blessed day."[50]

Emersonian Epiphanies: "Not Imitation but Creation"

> *[Homer Dodge] Martin was no longer interested in accurate observation and in detailed records as the ultimate end in view, but tried, rather, to feel Nature's moods, and to sense that inner consciousness of things upon which dwell the thoughts of truly great artists.*[51]
>
> —William Macbeth, "A Centennial Exhibition of Homer D. Martin," 1936

Ralph Waldo Emerson's epiphanies, or "mystical experiences" splendidly served the purposes of Tonalist painters; and precisely because such creative endeavors were both deeply personal and steeped in homeland sensibilities, they furthered Emerson's call for an independent and self-reliant cultural vision, cutting the cord of European tradition and establishing the basis for a national art. Not surprisingly, the Tonalists' favored times of day, dusk and dawn, or the seasons of autumn, winter, and early spring (natural analogies of death and birth), when tonal relationships were most subtle and landscape symbolism most pronounced, were precisely the times when Emerson felt his keenest response. "What can be conceived so beautiful as actual Nature? I never see the dawn break or the sun set as last evening when from every grey or slate colored cloud over the whole dome depended a wreath of roses, or look down the river with its tree planted banks absolutely affecting an elegancy, without a lively curiosity as to its reality and a self-recollection that I am not in a dream."[52] Such visceral responses, as opposed to the more formal language in his philosophical essays, explain how Emerson could accept much of Swedenborg's mystical belief in the idea of correspondence—the energizing notion behind Inness's most frenzied spurts of creativity—that all things in the natural world have counterparts in the immaterial world of the spirit.

As was the case with symbols and pattern recognition, Emerson's acute response to the muted tonalities of dawn and dusk seem to be universal adaptive responses to the environment. When the sun is low on the horizon and the spectrum of reds are weakest, the human eye becomes acutely sensitive to the spectrum from blue to green, and thus more exquisitely aware of the subtle color changes, especially among the greens, as sunlight falters. This, too, as John D. Barrow has explained, is a likely evolutionary adaptation: "The implication is that this twilight zone is the most dangerous one: lighting conditions are varying quickly; nocturnal predators are appearing; and fatigue is setting in. It might well be more adaptive to have better vision during this brief, but dangerous, period than to optimize reception to the spectrum of moonlight when the light levels are too low to allow any real advantage to be had from it."[53] Barrow goes on to note the survival benefit for hunter-gatherers to be able to discriminate acutely between a variety of greens along the color spectrum of red to green. "If coloured food sources are being exploited by, say, birds with colour vision, then later arrivals on the evolutionary scene (like primates), competing for the same resources, will find improved colour vision adaptive."[54] Throughout the Tonalist canon, the artists, as has been demonstrated repeatedly, were drawn to dawn and twilight, to cloudy weather and microclimates, often near the shore, heavy with fog and opalescent atmospheres—landscapes in which the greens of trees, foliage, and grasses offer the most somber yet sensuous and dreamlike display of various tonalities. In this, artists were simply exploiting an existing predisposition in the adaptation of human eyesight. Tonalists from Constable to Inness, from Whistler to Dwight Tryon and Birge Harrison, fully acknowledged this deeply human capacity, not only eliciting the extraordinary array of vivid greens in the landscape but also endowing them with the metamorphic energy found in the vibration and refraction of light between contiguous tones.

The deep, rich greens and brooding symbolic power of a painting like Ben Foster's *Twilight on the Housatonic*, circa 1910 (fig. 7.12), seem to originate in the same dreamlike awe experienced by Emerson in the gloaming along the Concord River. Here, overlooking the Housatonic River near Foster's summer home in Cornwall Hollow, Connecticut, the artist's looming foreground trees and the rhythmic, billowing soft-edged forms spilling along the twilit riverbank evoke a landscape that is somehow alive—or comes to life under the intuitive hand of the artist. As Emerson observed: "[T]he poet conforms things to his thoughts... esteems nature... as fluid, and impresses his being thereon. To him, the refractory world is ductile and flexible; he invests dust and stones with humanity... The remotest spaces of nature are visited, and the farthest sundered things are brought together, by a subtle spiritual connection."[55] Foster's subtle green tones vibrate in the eye, while the artist's expressive brushstrokes depict a rhythmic yet disturbingly evasive power throughout the canvas: trees, rocks, clouds—softened and blurred in the ambient and reflected light—hover on immateriality and the otherworldly. The cumulative impact of pulsing color and rhythmic pattern invoke an eerie and indescribably mystical experience, in turn prompting curiosity about what lies beyond the next turn in the river, if not a more visual rapture produced in the mind by the transformation of natural metaphors into fluid paint. Emerson described such experience as symbols of the observer's inner life: "In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature... From the earth, as a shore, I look out into that silent sea. I seem to partake its silent transformations: the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind."[56]

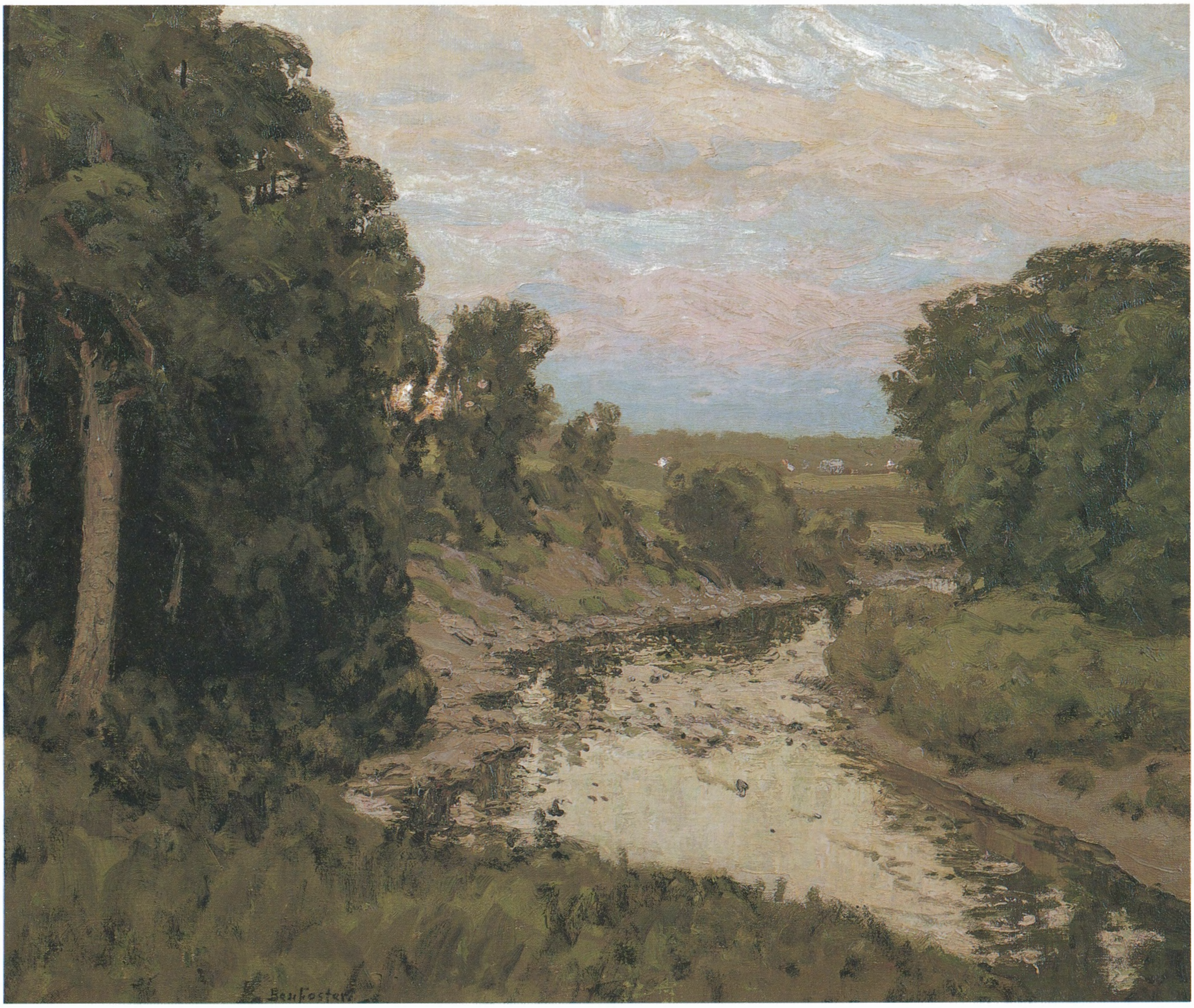


Fig. 7.12. Ben Foster, *Twilight on the Housatonic*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Private collection.

Emerson's classic description of his experience of mystical or transcendent oneness, the subjective rapture that would inflame the hearts of so many painters and poets, comes from the opening of *Nature*: "Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all."[57] This expression of merging with nature has become something of a commonplace in Transcendentalist thought since Emerson's day, but for mid-nineteenth-century Americans seeking an original voice and outlook, Emerson's writings, which for all their idealism insisted on the concrete reality of nature as the basis of belief, remained the touchstone for liberal or post-doctrinaire Christian spirituality; or, as Emerson phrased it in *Nature*, "for an original relation to the universe," "a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition."[58] His rhapsodic flights inspired legions of his readers in antebellum America to seek similar insights into themselves and the natural world on their doorstep, underscored by the rapid absorption of Darwin and Spencer's ideas about evolution. For today's listeners, it can seem difficult to recover the freshness of his words, but Emerson's contemporaries swooned over his breathless descriptions: "The western clouds divided and subdivided themselves into pink flakes modulated with tints of unspeakable softness; and the air had so much life and sweetness, that it was a pain to come within doors. . . . The leafless trees become spires of flame in the sunset, with the blue east for their background, and the stars of the dead calices of flowers, and every withered stem and stubble rimed with frost, contribute something to the mute music."[59]

Emerson and Tragedy: The Elegiac Poetry of Landscape

For all the uplifting appeal of Emerson, it should not be forgotten that for the generation that had experienced the Civil War, and those generations that followed, there was, too, a darker Emerson—the grief-stricken husband and father who

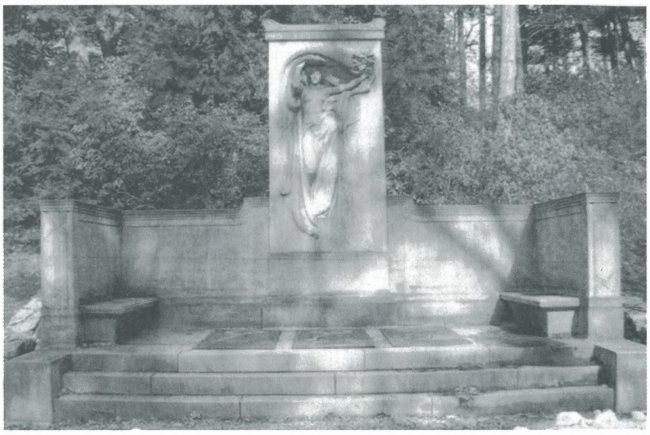


Fig. 7.13. Melvin Memorial designed by Daniel Chester French, 1906–08, Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts.

unflinchingly faced the world on its starkest terms. Without this elegiac, often moody and grief-tinged undercurrent in his writings, the attraction to Emerson likely would have been more limited, something that can also be said of the melancholy autumnal poetry of the Tonalist landscape. Emerson had experienced the loss of his first wife—the great love of his life—a beloved son, and two brothers before he was forty. Here was a man who was so moved to grapple with the absolute reality of death that he found himself compelled to open the coffins of both his wife and son, a year after their deaths, to gaze on their ravished remains and so re-anchor the emotion of loss in the rawest, most horrifying visual data. His religious, ethical, and aesthetic convictions were based in both the harsh realities and glories of nature. With regard to such personal tragedies, Emerson wrote of art's ameliorative balm. "The intellect is a consoler, which delights in detaching, or putting an interval between a man and his fortune, and so converts the sufferer into a spectator, and his pain into poetry. It yields the joys of conversation, of letters, and of science. Hence also the torments of life become tuneful tragedy, solemn and soft with music, and garnished with rich dark pictures. But higher still than the activities of art, the intellect in its purity, and the moral sense in its purity, are not distinguished from each other, and both ravish us into a region whereinto these passionate clouds of sorrow cannot rise."[60] This, too, was the solemn precinct limned by the Tonalist painter, a consoling place of "rich dark pictures" and often elegiac poetry.

For this and many reasons, Emerson's poignant prose and poetry rang all the more true for those who had immediate experience of the Civil War, and their children, two generations marked by cynicism and irony and yet deeply hopeful for the consolations of "an original relation to the universe." The town of Concord lost forty-eight soldiers in the Civil War, including the three Melvin brothers, who were honored with a moving memorial by Daniel Chester French in Concord's Sleepy Hollow Cemetery (fig. 7.13). Thoreau, who died in 1862, might have been spared knowledge of the full cost of his abolitionist fervor, but Emerson, like Inness, had decades to ponder the terrible cost of freedom. Emerson, as has been noted by Robert Richardson, one of his finest interpreters, was a modern Stoic, which was perhaps the quality he most shared with Thoreau. But Emerson was far from alone. Even tough realists like Oliver Wendell Holmes and William James, believers in free will and the efficacy of human actions, returned to Emerson time and time again. Emerson struck just the right balance between the transcendent and real, the ideal and practical, material and spiritual—all of it somehow grounded in raw experience, especially the epiphanies that arise out of the mundane and tragic.

Perhaps at no time before or since has such a large and influential part of the American public, neither bound to a traditional creed nor absent a spiritual craving, shared such a profound attachment to a single thinker (with the exception of Thoreau), and a spiritual life deeply invested in the beatitudes of the landscape—a landscape that encompassed the conflicted needs of the soul. If not a replacement for traditional religious observance, Emersonian idealism provided a moral stance that transcended facile pantheism; as it had for the post–Civil War generation, the landscape offered more than mere solace—it held their dead, their memories, the tragic forces of fate that had spared few families in New England. Such a voicing of Stoic reverence for nature as the source of nurturing life and even moral direction was unprecedented in antebellum New England, but found millions of adherents in the later part of the nineteenth century. This, too, was part and parcel of the New England inheritance, which by the 1870s found resonance across the country and in the work of Tonalist painters.

Ben Foster and the Attentive Eye: The Use of Expressive Paint Handling to Embody Emotion and the Metamorphic Life of Nature

For an artist like Ben Foster, who tirelessly painted the pastures and hillsides of his summer residence in Cornwall Hollow (fig. 7.14), the elegiac writings of Emerson and Thoreau may well have provided a kind of inspirational blueprint for divining the hidden language—Emerson's "mute music" and Thoreau's "mysterious and unexplorable" allegory—and tragic symbolism of home ground. Not unlike Monet of the 1890s and later, who attempted to record the changing nature of light on a fixed scene, Foster pursued his goals with a quasi-scientific rigor. Like so many Tonalists, Foster preferred an informal approach to his subject, almost always from off-kilter angles, a kind of informed happenstance and calculated serendipity that approach the subterfuge of the hunter. As Emerson preached, "To the attentive eye, each moment of the year has its own beauty, and in the same field, it beholds, every hour, a picture

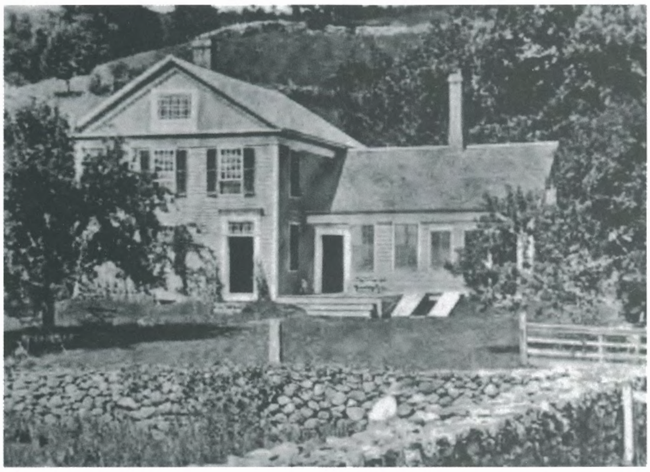


Fig. 7.14. Ben Foster's house in Cornwall Hollow, Connecticut, photographed for *Connecticut Magazine*, vol. 9, 1905.

which was never seen before, and which shall never be seen again. The heavens change every moment, and reflect their glory or gloom on the plains beneath."[61]

For the insightful observer, the vantage point was everything. Foster's summer retreat in Cornwall Hollow was surrounded by low hills crossed by stone walls and old pastures and orchards, studded with tree lines and woodlots and freestanding oaks, white pines, and birches. The nearby town of Cornwall had been incorporated in 1740, but had been largely bypassed by early settlers because of the thick pine forests that were hard to clear. By the time Foster, a native of Maine, took up residence around the turn of the century, the mountains and hills had been largely clear-cut, and many times over, to fuel the ironworks that had flourished in the area from before 1800. Only a few stands of magnificent white pine remained and even the first farmers had begun deserting the area by 1810, at first in a trickle and then a rush as the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 drew agricultural workers to the West.

In Foster's day the factories and farms were mostly defunct and only a summer population of visitors, which reached 125 by 1880, kept the local economy viable. Foster, like so many Tonalists, including the watercolorist James Henry Moser, a fellow resident of Cornwall Hollow, was drawn to such abandoned places for both nostalgic and artistic reasons. The hilly nature of his country retreat, the rise and fall and vertical thrust of the landscape, the glacial power of the living earth as it ground rocks and exposed their weather-beaten faces to the sky, became Foster's preferred subject matter. This was not the rich alluvial soil of pastoral Concord, which had provided Emerson and Thoreau with their inspiration fifty years before, but a raw, hardscrabble world largely absent its original inhabitants—a landscape poignant with the remnants of humankind's brief passage and faltering prospects on the earth.

In *Hill and Valley*, circa 1905 (fig. 7.15), Foster frames his subject with a tiered copse, beginning with the immediate foreground of green leaves and fallen branches, moving to a middle tier of small, autumn-shorn oaks, and a final encompassing armature of vertical pines and starkly denuded trees. This layered aperture directs the eye to the distant hillside pastures of Foster's home, many only inhabited by stands of silver birch, their white barklike sprays of wildflowers under a muted sky. The square composition, a favorite formal device of Foster's, crops the tallest framing trees and compresses the scene in a thoroughly artificial manner. The artist's imposed geometry only heightens the odd and haunting juxtaposition of a clamorous overgrown foreground, perhaps a rare grove of mature trees, and the ethereal distance, an aesthetic approximation of the visual experience of sighting the far-off from the densities of wooded cover. Foster is expressing the sensation of near and far, nature underfoot and nature at distance, of being at once enclosed in nature and suddenly released to the horizon. Emotionally, the juxtaposition mirrors the objective immediacy and safety of the present moment—sheltering nature or the material world near-at-hand, contrasted with the more subjective flavor of the far-away and indistinct, and its association with memory and perhaps the temptations of future exploration. It is this mingling and jostling of time-sensations, time present, time past, and time to come—time and timelessness—that forms the crucible of the mystical experience, situating the viewer in the eternal moment of silence and solitude.

An interviewer who visited Foster in Cornwall Hollow noted the artist's "delicate powers of observation, which

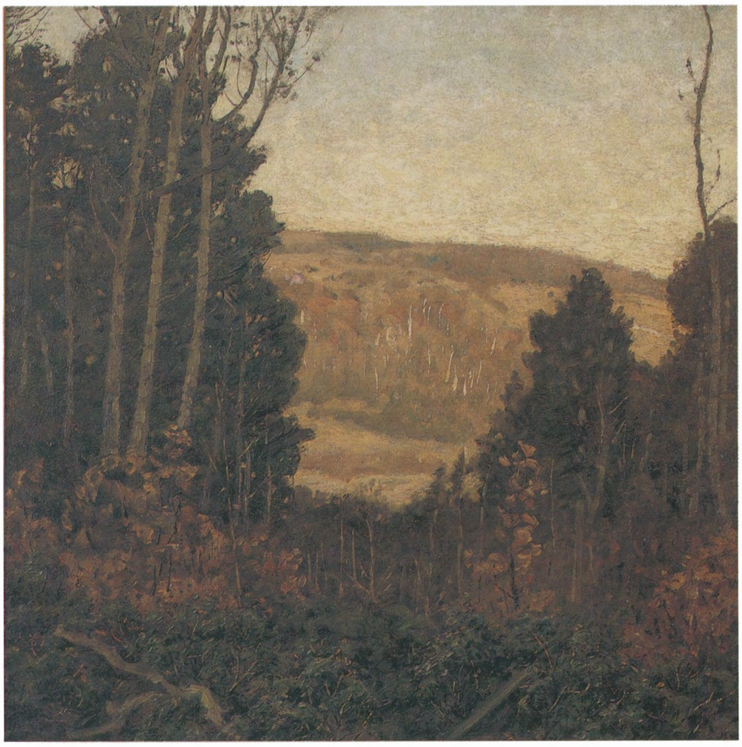


Fig. 7.15. Ben Foster, *Hill and Valley*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in. Private collection.

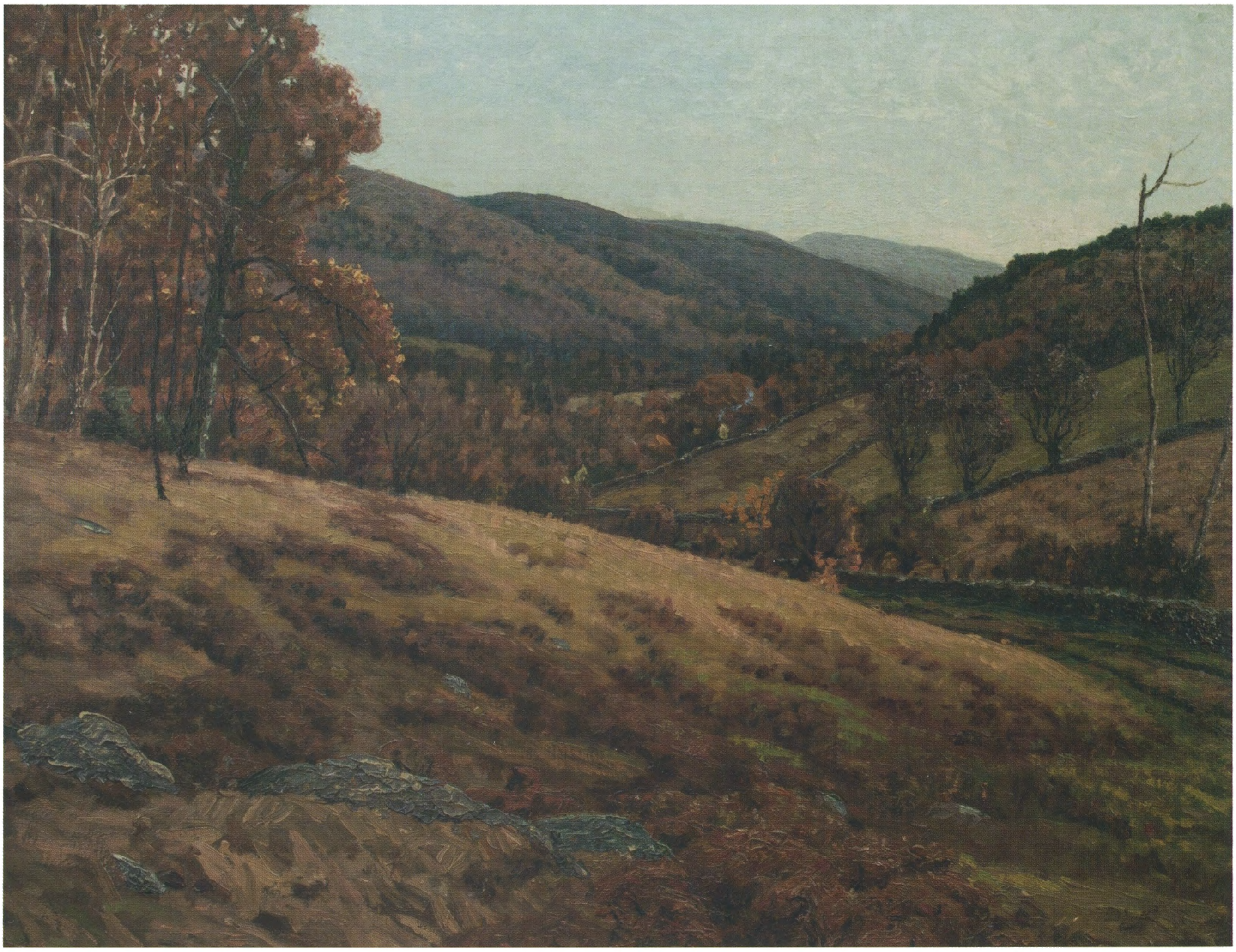


Fig. 7.16. Ben Foster, *Wild Valley View*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 in. Private collection.

preserves the aloofness of nature undisturbed by his own presence. Always, too, his canvases are lighted with the ideal; infused with imagination, they waken the imagination of the beholder; there is always the poetic suggestion beyond and above all considerations of technique and execution. Possibly this quality comes from the fact that Mr. Foster's pictures are often worked out and finished from memory, in his studio, so that there has been time for the sublimation of the ideal from the real...."[62] Foster's creation of a nature aloof from the observer suggests the inexorable process of evolution and metamorphosis, which in a matter of decades would repopulate Foster's home ground with pine forests—milliseconds in geological time. Today, Cornwall Hollow is nearly as forested as it was in the eighteenth century. Ben Foster's art offers a snapshot of frozen time. *Hills and Valley* is not "pretty" in any conventional sense; its subtle symbols and patterns provoke, in equal measure, thought, analysis, and equivocal sensations, perhaps something of Emerson's fleeting sensations of "glory and gloom."

Wild Valley View, circa 1910 (fig. 7.16), is more conventional in scope but no less compelling and strange. The switchback of diagonals forces the eye to travel the composition from the rocky outcroppings in the foreground to the last distant hilltop in the distance in a visual roller-coaster ride. The pigment is molten and plastic and seems to literally flow down the near slopes, a visual or tactile approximation of the inherent life force of the earth underfoot, even on the cusp of winter. In this scabrous autumnal scene, man's hand is found everywhere: the old pastures, the trundling fieldstone walls, the bowed apple trees, and the hint of a smoking chimney in the distant valley—all natural symbols arranged in pitch-perfect patterns, yet the return of wildness impinges at every blink of the attentive eye. Foster, like Thoreau, understood the hidden narrative of these places: "Look at their fields, and imagine what they might write, if ever they should put pen to paper. Or what have they not written on the face of the earth already, clearing, and burning, and scratching, and harrowing, and plowing, and subsoiling, in and in, and out and out, and over and over, again and again, erasing what they had already written for want of parchment."[63] Thoreau's Concord landscape, like Foster's, is replete with the human presence at every turning, a faltering past eliding into nature's eternal present, and there lost to memory—except for the artist and writer who might keep something of these previous inhabitants alive through their art. That Foster was attuned to such doleful ruminations is caught in the lines from the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khyyam, which Foster sent along in a note with a painting, a wedding present to an old friend: "Yon rising moon that looks for us again—/How oft hereafter will she wax and wane;/How oft hereafter rising look for us/Through this same garden—and for one in vain!"[64]

These human landscapes were treasured by a naturalist like John Burroughs, who translated—and embodied—the thoughts of Emerson and Thoreau for Foster's generation: "How has the farmer planted himself in his fields; builded himself into his stone walls, and evoked the sympathy of the hills by his struggle!... The fields and woods and waters about one are a book from which he may draw exhaustless entertainment, if he will. One must not only learn the writing, he must translate the language, the signs, and the hieroglyphics. It is a very quaint and elliptical writing, and much must be supplied by the wit of the translator."[65] Such "hieroglyphics" are found everywhere in Foster's wild valley, telling of the extinction of one breed (the early settlers who first cleared the forested hills) and the coming into being, or hovering presence, of a corresponding world of living presences, of the wilderness reclaiming its own. The canted, desiccated russet oaks to the left in *Wild Valley View*, the barren sapling to the right, and the seething pigments in the foreground are intimations of the grinding, immemorial cycles of metamorphosis, of the new coming into being as the old is swept away. This is Ovid translated into paint. There is nothing of fall's splendor in Foster's wilderness; the colors are gray and sober browns, and muddy amber, yet the fallow earth everywhere invokes signs of parturition and rebirth, the fecund layers of dead grasses and fallen leaves incubating a new life and a new world.

The poet and artist Khalil Gibran, in a tribute to Albert Pinkham Ryder, touched on the tragic transitoriness so often portrayed in such Tonalist landscapes, writing of Ryder's hills that "... relate the unrecorded deeds of unremembered races ... whose sky withholds the secrets of unnamed gods. O, poet, who has heard thee but the spirits that follow Thy footprints?"[66] *Wild Valley View*, as its title suggests, is an allegory of wildness, touching more on the rawness at the heart of Thoreau's vision than Emerson's, a somber yet hopeful witness of the hand of man being slowly subsumed by nature. Perhaps Foster, nearing his seventies, intimates something of his own decline, that he, too, is not immune to the inexorability of change that had swept away the former inhabitants of his beloved hills and valleys.

In *Woodland Stream*, circa 1910 (fig. 7.17), Foster again confines his perspective in a nearly square format, cropping his middle-ground tree forms to emphasize their craggy yet elegant patterns, at the same moment bringing the attentive eye, literally, down to earth. The viewer stares upward from the rocky, leaf-swaddled bank of a sunken stream, the gaze intercepted by a scrim of yellow leaves in the near distance. The beyond, the distant hillsides, are brought into closer focus by contrast with the intervening tree shapes and fluid yellows. The careening, stone-walled pastures sloping downward have already gone to woods, transformed into a hazy calligraphy of tree forms pouring forth into the mountain stream that drains their watershed. The murmur of running water in the silence of a fall interlude enchants the invisible wayfarer, preserving nature's aloofness. Again, one feels the weight of Foster's hillsides impinging on the valley, the stream, too, another reminder of gravity's inexorable will, and the infinite weight of geologic time, which trumps man's brief seconds of sensate life. Yet the fictile movement of the stream as it carves a path through the stony hillsides plays its allotted role in the scheme of things, exposing a scattering of scarred rocks, so they, too, might voice their presence under the sun.

Executed during the declining years of his career and the Tonalist movement, *Waning Day*, 1916 (see fig. 5.126), a signature painting for Foster, evokes the poise and ponderation of age. Foster's rugged hills—here a single hillside—no longer ramble and jostle in the mind but are held in abeyance; this gentle hillside is restful and magisterial in demeanor, as if the artist, nearing his seventies, is resigned to his fate.

Foster's multifaceted visions of the Cornwall Hollow hills approximate something of the spiritual world Emerson attempted to elucidate in prose and poetry. Foster may have worked in traditional modes, at least to the modern eye, but the power of his vision, haunted by unseen forces, remains alive to the senses. His triumph, along with his colleagues, was to make Emerson's natural symbols come alive by endowing them with felt life, with movement and intimations of metamorphosis. Foster discovered a landscape of congruities, convergences, correlations, and even Swedenborgian correspondences: the material world enhanced in the reflected glow of the spiritual. Surprises wait at every turn in the path. Nature is as ruthlessly cruel as sublime. If Foster's natural forms live in the mind's eye, it is, as Emerson suggested, because they touch on living symbols. They display an artist's passion to delve into the mystery of natural artifacts—why certain forms in certain lights, cloaked in pellucid yet tangible atmosphere, and viewed from unusual or dramatic angles, perhaps arranged in startling or unusual patterns, resonate in the mind, and so appropriate the power of vital symbols. These are the vital symbols that Emerson insisted must inform a living faith. Not a relic of a dead past or academic modes, they are a revaluing of the expression of nature in light of an intuitive sympathy. Emerson was explicit when he wrote in his journal commenting on the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge's insightful thoughts on the act of perception: "Every object rightly seen unlocks a new faculty of the Soul." "That is to say," Emerson explains, "it becomes a

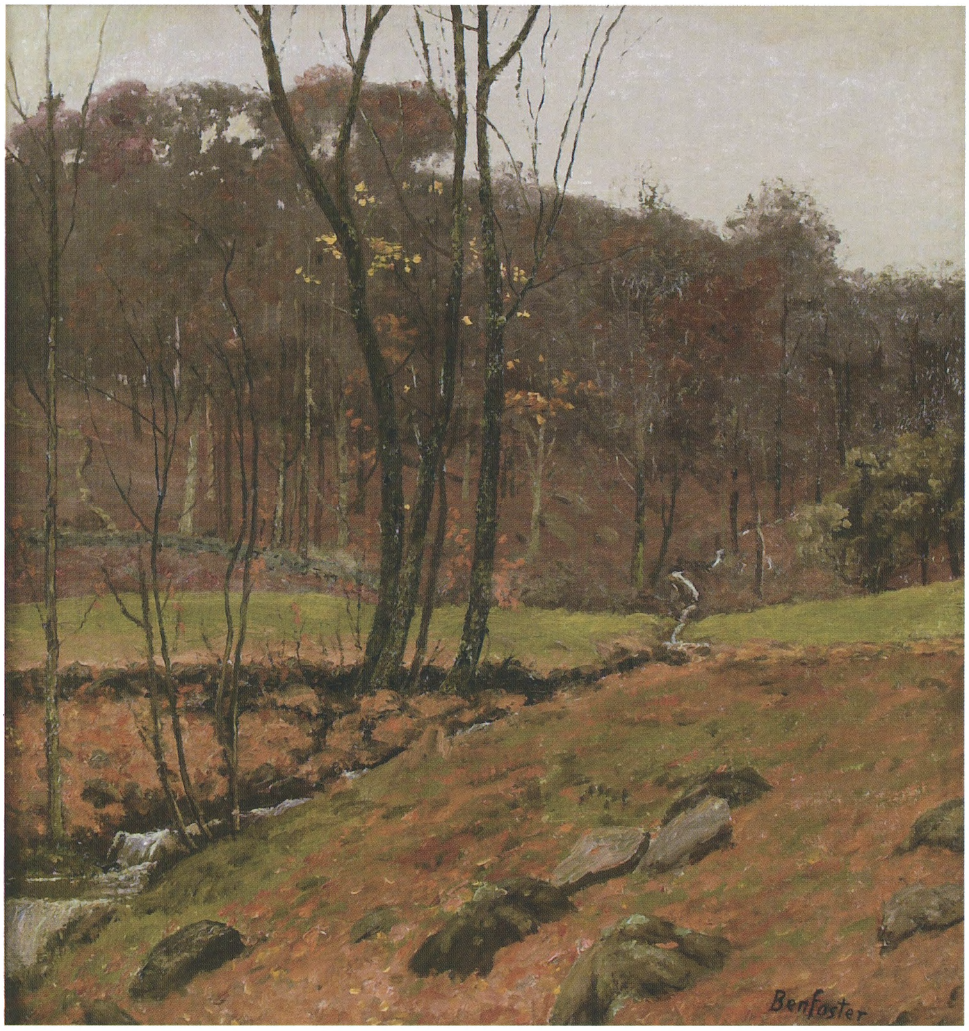


Fig. 7.17. Ben Foster, *Woodland Stream*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 21 x 20 in. Private collection.

part of the domain of consciousness: before it was unconscious truth, now is available knowledge."[67]

The great Tonalist artists, like Ben Foster, tapped into this unconscious truth. In effect, the artist managed to isolate natural facts, explore them by way of a range of formal and imaginative strategies to fully galvanize their mysterious carrying power as symbols. Foster's rocks cry out. To do this required a plumbing, not just of the artist's personal feelings, but of a lifetime of the soul's investment in the laboratory of the world. His was not an easy art—"commercial" in today's terms—and Foster seems to have been well aware of the fact. A contemporary journalist commented, "For mere popularity he has cared not at all. Painting to please the passing fancy of the public may mean success for the moment; but, in the long run, he believes, compromise is deadening in its effects. Be content to work in obscurity for long years if need be; devotion to one's ideal as he sees it will at last be crowned with real success."[68] This intrepid stance was precisely the kind of Yankee self-reliance, self-knowledge, and self-education that Emerson valued and championed in all his writings. With uncanny foresight, Emerson's essay *Art*, published in 1841, an injunction for a landscape style as yet unformulated, anticipates by thirty years the rise of the Tonalist movement and artists like Ben Foster: "Thus in our fine arts, not imitation, but creation is the aim. In landscapes, the painter should give the suggestion of a fairer creation than we know. The details, the prose of nature he should omit, and give us only the spirit and splendor. He should know that the landscape has beauty for his eye, because it expresses a thought which is to him good: and this, because the same power which sees through his eyes, is seen in that spectacle; and he will come to value the expression of nature, and not nature itself, and so exalt in his copy, the features that please him. He will give the gloom of gloom, and the sunshine of sunshine."[69]

The Writer and the Artist: The Art of Atmosphere and the Unseen Air

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the success of the Tonalists is the result not only of a radical break with tradition but also of a freeing-up of innate capacities that allowed them to tap into modes of expression largely closed

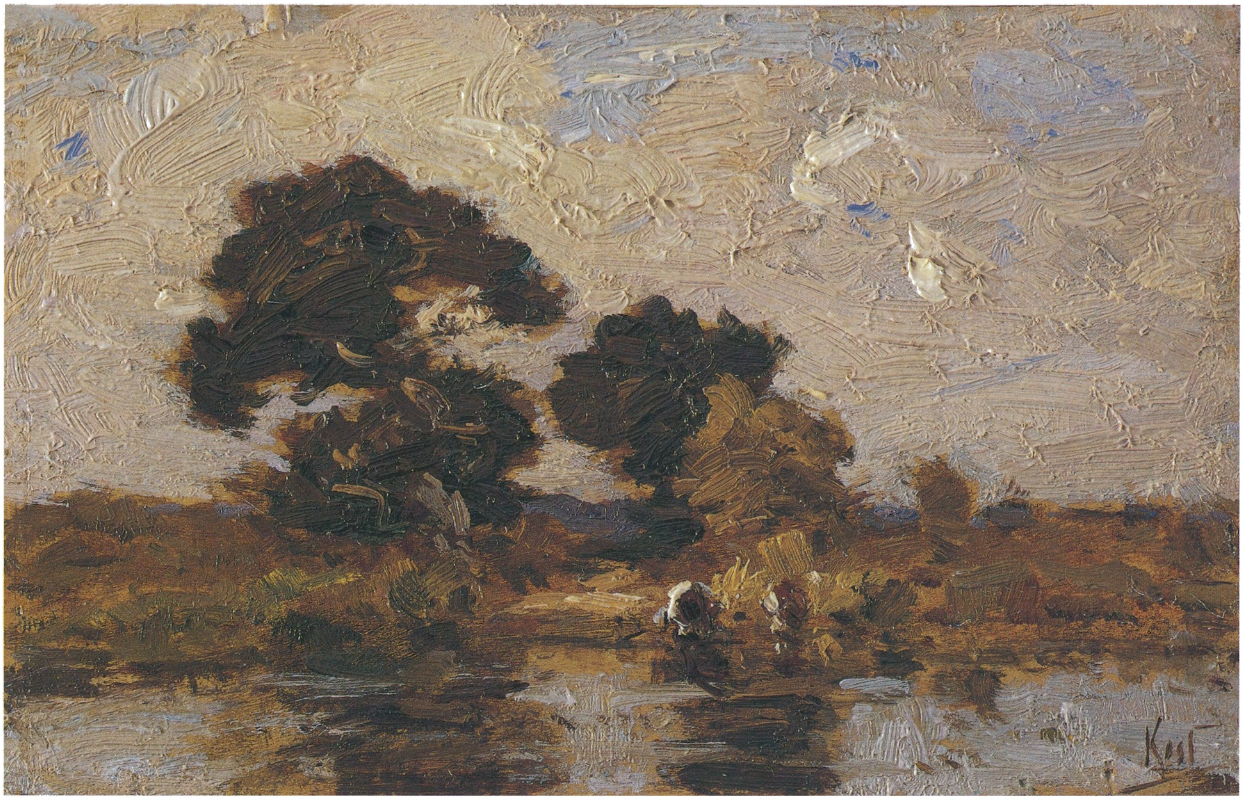


Fig. 7.17.1. Frederick W. Kost, *River View*, c. 1905. Oil on panel, 4 x 6½ in. Private collection.

off to their artist predecessors. Where Tonalists like Ben Foster—and George Inness, Alexander Wyant, and Charles Warren Eaton—had an advantage over writers and poets like Emerson and Thoreau was in the visual resources at their disposal, the means of expression that allowed them to communicate in ways unavailable to the nature writer. One reason for this is suggested by the contemporary philosopher and cultural ecologist David Abram in his book *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996): the development of phonetic language fostered a more abstract relationship between humans and the natural world, superseding earlier oral and pictographic languages, which retained a symbolic and gestural tie to the sights, sounds, and smells of the living earth. Abram argues that the abstraction of language hampers an immersion in the deepest sensuous experiences of life. To an unprecedented degree, the Tonalist artist managed to overcome this hurdle by the concrete display of form, color, texture, and by giving in the very brushstroke an approximation not just of the shapes, rhythms, patterns, and metaphoric energies inherent in nature but of his own galvanic being. In an uncanny combination of progressive means with primordial ends (a quintessentially modernist dynamic), the Tonalist artist was able to re-create a kind of ancient prephonetically based form of expression, akin to a pictographic language, which not only was embedded in the raw data of the natural world but also reciprocated in kind, responding or synchronizing the moving gesture of the artist's hand with the things of perception.

In discussing the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, Abram makes a compelling case for this reciprocal basis of perception, which, of course, constitutes the essential relationship of painters to their subject. "In the act of perception, in other words, I enter into a sympathetic relation with the perceived, which is possible only because neither my body nor the sensible exists outside the flux of time, and so each has its own dynamism, its own pulsation and style. Perception, in this sense, is an attunement or synchronization between my own rhythms and the rhythms of the things themselves, their own tones and textures:... *in so far as my hand knows hardness and softness, and my gaze knows the moon's light, it is as a certain way of linking up with the phenomenon and communicating with it. Hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, moonlight and sunlight, present themselves in our recollection not pre-eminently as sensory contents but as certain kinds of symbioses, certain ways the outside has of invading us and certain ways we have of meeting this invasion....*"[70] Abram suggests something that an artist instinctively understands—that participation is ineluctably a part of perception. "By asserting that perception, phenomenologically considered, is inherently participatory, we mean that perception always involves, at its most intimate level, the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives. Prior to all verbal reflections, at the level of our spontaneous, sensorial engagement with the world around us, we are *all* animists...Thus, at the most primordial level of sensuous, bodily experience, we find ourselves in an expressive, gesturing landscape, in a world that *speaks*."[71] Abram's portrayal of the indissoluble link between the perceiver and perceived is another echo of Emerson's admonition to the artist: "He should know that the landscape has beauty for his eye, because it expresses a thought which is to him good: and this, because the same power which sees through his eyes, is seen in that spectacle..."[72] The artist's spontaneous response to movement in the landscape, in which eye and hand seemingly reply as one, is exemplified in Homer Dodge Martin's *Lake George*, circa 1884 (see fig. 2.22), in which the supple rhythms of the pigment, as seen in the bent tree in the foreground, seem to be prompted by the windblown powers animating this lakeside scene.

If Inness, Wyant, Martin, Blakelock, and Ryder were revered by their patrons as seers and visionaries, partly it had to do with a sense that these artists tapped into the animistic heart of nature with a profundity beyond ordinary men. Their art, their painterly language, was understood as a mystical communion with the unseen forces that enveloped life. Inness's dentist, S.C.G. Watkins, whom the artist befriended, wrote a reminiscence of his many hours and days watching Inness paint: "When he worked, his mind was concentrated on what he was doing. The outside world was nothing to him. His whole being was in that painting. He was placing his soul on that canvas. His whole being, body and soul, was so wrapped in the intensity of his work that it could be truly said it was his soul's work..."[73] Such encomiums for artist-seers were not unusual by the turn of the century. Blakelock's moonlights and Indian encampments were considered a visceral reaching out—or back—for some lost primordial relationship to the earth, while Ryder's nocturnal wanderers were understood to traverse a path of mythic wonder at world's end. The near-religious exaltation accorded Inness and his art was that of a shaman—a genius, perhaps an introverted or slightly mad genius—who, by living apart or delving into nature's ways, was able to portray a timeless world, the "spirit and splendor," wherein hidden truths were made manifest.

For the city dweller who felt cut off from the sources of life-giving energy and inspiration that nature provided, the Tonalist artist offered glimpses of a lost rootedness with the earth that pre-dates abstract language and logic. The visual and emotional resources of Tonalism—intimate closed-in landscapes, limited horizons and deep fore- and middle-grounds, the emphasis on soft-edged form and the resulting feeling of palpable, all-encompassing atmosphere—provided a sensation of timelessness, in which past and future merge in the immediacy of an eternal present. As Abram has pointed out, this is a realm well known to pre-literate societies, which "lack any absolute distinction between 'space' and 'time.'... It is evident, however, that when our awareness of time is joined with our awareness of space, space itself is transformed. Space is no longer experienced as a homogenous void, but reveals itself as this vast and richly textured field in which we are corporeally immersed, this vibrant expanse structured by both a ground and a horizon. It is precisely the ground and the horizon that transform abstract space into space-time. And these characteristics—the ground and the horizon—*are granted to us only by the earth*. Thus, when we let time and space blend into a unified space-time, we rediscover the enveloping earth... Only when space and time are reconciled into a single, unified field of phenomena does the encompassing earth become evident, once again, in all its power and its depth, as the very ground and horizon of all our knowing."[74]

Something of this ancient feeling for unified space-time—the timeless rapture so esteemed by mystics—was captured in the art of the Tonalists. When period critics described Tonalist landscapes in terms of mood, transport, suspension of time, harmony, vision, dreams, and silence, it was toward this timeless realm that they were directing their thoughts, in which the "long ago" and the "in the future" merged into a moment of silent rapture. When Inness and Henry James spoke of art as revealing the "unseen," they were suggesting the supersensible reality—the shadow land of imaginative insights—hovering just out of sight behind the transparent scrim of the quotidian. For the Greeks and many traditional societies this was conceived as the world of spirits, the numinous realm of the air, the preserve of the winds and wafting scents—and human breath—the animating life force that passes through all things. Abram writes: "[F]or ancient Mediterranean cultures no less than for the Lakota and the Navajo, the air was once a singularly sacred presence. As the experiential source of both psyche and spirit, it would seem that the air was once felt to be the very matter of awareness, the subtle body of the mind. *And hence that awareness, far from being experienced as a quality that distinguishes humans from the rest of nature, was originally felt as that which invisibly joined human beings to the other animals and to the plants, to the forests and to the mountains. For it was the unseen but common medium of their existence*."[75]

For Thoreau, who, better than anyone in his generation, embodied the experience of pre-literate cultures in his nature ramblings, the breezes wafting over Walden Pond were spirit-filled. "A field of water betrays the spirit that is in the air. It has new life and motion. It is intermediate between land and sky. On land, only the grass and trees wave, but the water itself is *rippled* by the wind. I see the breeze dash across it in streaks and flakes of light. It is somewhat singular that we should look down on the surface of water. We shall *look down* on the surface of air next, and mark where a still nobler spirit sweeps over it."[76] Thoreau, an expert classicist, was primed for these observations by his study of the Greeks, in which the numinous air was conceived as a thing of the spirit, and nature a force or energy. It was precisely this spiritual experience of the unifying

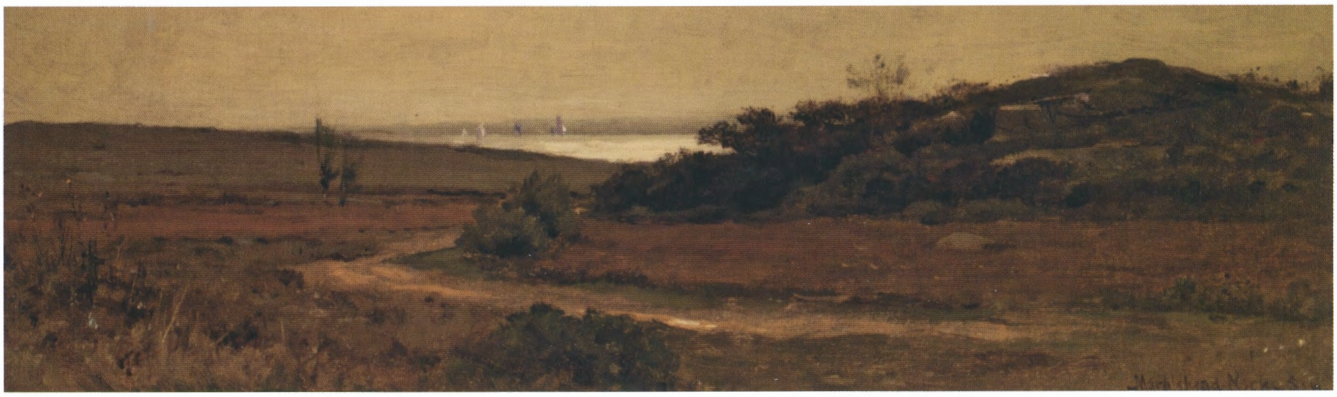


Fig. 7.17.2. George H. Smillie, *Marblehead Neck*, 1881. Oil laid on board, 6 x 20 in. Private collection.

atmosphere that the Tonalist painters sought to capture, why they were so enamored of dawn and dusk and autumnal gloom, when the green tones of the earth showed themselves in an intense otherworldly blur and the very air seemed most visible and alive. For a Swedenborgian like Inness, the sensation of air, of wind and storm, was a reminder of a supersensible reality and parallel spiritual realm, as it had been for the animistic cultures of pre-Christian Europe, when, as Abram writes, the rivers, trees, and the animals voiced themselves to mankind. "The invisible atmosphere was thus the assumed intermediary in all communication, a zone of subtle influences crossing, mingling, and metamorphosing. This invisible yet palpable realm of whiffs and scents, of vegetative emanations and animal exhalations, was also the unseen repository of ancestral voices, the home of stories yet to be spoken, of ghosts and spirited intelligences—a kind of collective field of meaning from whence individual awareness continually emerged and into which it continually receded, with every inbreath and outbreath."[77]

Even the critic Charles de Kay, also a poet and short-story writer, tapped into this prehistoric, preliterate realm of myth and spirit—as had Albert Pinkham Ryder, the artist he promoted and collected. In his short story, *Manmat'ha,* de Kay tells of a disillusioned Civil War veteran and his encounters with an invisible being in his rural New Jersey hideaway in the Navesink hills: "...the ancient apple orchard, and the meager vegetable and flower garden, which alone remained of a former farm. The barns, the plowed lands, and the fences had disappeared. Only a heavy stone wall with flagged top, which protected the garden from the road, reminded one of a former powerful owner." Here amid scenes of a defunct agricultural world, the quintessential abode of the Tonalist landscape, the narrator contemplates the mysteries of the unexplained presences he feels all about him in his past-haunted realm. "It occurs to one very soon that animal life does exist of so transparent a texture that to all intents and purposes it is invisible...Why, then, by survival of the most transparent, should not some invisible life of a high grade hold a secure position on the earth?" With this pseudo-scientific nod to a Darwinian explanation for the adaptation and survival of the fittest—the author's so-called "invisibles"—de Kay's narrator casts his eye about for telltale signs of the unseen presence he senses following him (detected in the sudden flight of a hawk, the ripples on a pond)—possibly just his overwrought imagination or a "nervous illusion." "Pondering thus, I had been startled not a little by coming now and again on facts that seemed to bear this out. Strange tracks through untrodden grass suggested footsteps of the unseen. Flattened spaces of peculiar shape in the standing rye, where human beings could not have intruded, looked marvelously like human visitation...Who that has walked or run through autumn woods at night has not sometimes looked curiously over his shoulder at the sound of following steps?"[78] De Kay's veteran ("Events had so affected me that I considered nothing left in life but an alternation of hard work and of utter retreat from humanity...") finally manages to trap the spectral entity who follows him, and it, or rather she, turns out to be the spirit of an Indian maiden—Manmat'ha, still wandering the ancient hunting grounds of her people. Whether or not this is simply a good ghost story or a romantic yarn, de Kay touches on the inner life of his troubled generation, a generation that felt profoundly its loss or separation from the natural world, drawn, as Inness, Foster, Ryder, and Blakelock certainly were, to the penumbral boundary between the real and unreal, the seen and unseen forces that permeated life. In his dreamlike poetry, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—a friend of the poet Joseph Rodman Drake (the grandfather of Charles de Kay)—had long dipped his pen into this moonlit stream of spirit and wonder as well.

The soft-edged natural forms, so essential to the Tonalist aesthetic, and the opalescent yet palpable atmospheric envelope, provided a sense of awe and aching ambiguity; they were spaces into which the imaginative mind might well turn to memory and the call of ancestral voices—de Kay's "invisibles," "vanishers," or the "unseen." De Kay writes, "A moon after a rain was to my thinking the best for such mysterious beings, when everything was hazy with an imperceptible mist, when the dogwoods had flooded the landscape with sheets of reflected white, and somebody was drawing one veil after another slowly past a golden shield in the sky."[79] This verbal approximation of the lost emotions of childhood wanderings echoed the pre-literate bonding of man and nature that both Emerson and Thoreau sought to discover and elucidate in less fictional modes. To do so meant not just stretching the resources of expression but also breaking with prevailing norms of religion, philosophical thought, and even language itself, a language burdened with the abstract logic that confounded the imagination's origins in the spirit-workings of earth and sky. This very human attraction to the ambiguities and mysteries of the landscape, which became fundamental to the Tonalist style, seems to be yet another vestigial remnant of mankind's early development.

Henry David Thoreau: The Dynamic of Metamorphosis and the Confluence of the Material and Spiritual Realms

Thoreau's antebellum Concord of 1830 to 1862—the decades that encompassed most of the author's writings—was a very different place from the raw Connecticut hills and valleys of Cornwall Hollow known to Ben Foster in the decades around the turn of the century. During this time, Concord was a business and manufacturing center surrounded by working farms. Set amid softly undulating hills, fertile alluvial valleys, rivers, and ponds, Concord had been one of the first inland settlements of the seventeenth century. Yet, as Thoreau well knew, many of Concord's earliest inhabitants had left for better prospects out West. Thoreau mourned their absence. Forests and even large woodlots were rare, much rarer than today when many of the old pastures and farms of Concord, and much of New England, have returned to forests. But the variegated, civilized landscape of Thoreau's Concord provided a perfect laboratory and mindscape for his constant ramblings and reflections, a landscape of overgrown pastures, gentle tree lines, and river views that approximate the early savannalike landscapes in which the experience of early humans had been fundamentally shaped. This was the place that shaped the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, the molders of the New England mind.

If Emerson spoke to the lingering trauma of the Civil War generation in large and generous terms, gently weaning his readers from traditional religious clichés to homegrown verities grounded in everyday feeling, Thoreau set an example. Thoreau did not just write about retreating to the woods, he lived it at Walden; rather than simply praise nature's wonders, he got his hands dirty; and he went beyond preaching mystical wonder to embracing the wilderness (or what was left of it in his travels to Maine)—and wildness itself, reporting what he found. Emerson inspired his readers, while Thoreau told of his love and rapture and so was loved in return. Readers felt his loss and his melancholy and his struggle to make something useful of his humble life close to the earth. For the Tonalist painter, Thoreau embraced the rhythms of the artist's life: his insights were verbal equivalents of the artist's visual poetry. Thoreau was read and reread and completely absorbed. If Emerson might be skimmed and a few glorious passages underlined and immortal lines put to memory, Thoreau reflected back a sympathetic and emblematic life—his writings were experiments in a new language of feeling. He was a rebel, a rural bohemian, who sought to elevate his life—and the majesty of simple joys—by conscious endeavor. He was the classic American individualist, the model for American reinvention and new paths taken. His journals—his journey—took the reader as deep into the mind of a great spirit as any confessional literature. Emerson may have presented the grand strategy for the Transcendentalists and later the Tonalist movement, but Thoreau was the intrepid captain who carried out the design and epitomized the way of solitude and mystic rapture that was at the heart of the style. Thoreau was more practical, more of an embodied thinker than Emerson and conversant with the concrete metaphors that staked Emerson's idealism in the solid earth. And Emerson knew it: "That oaken strength which I noted whenever he walked or worked or surveyed wood lots, the same unhesitating hand with which a field-laborer accosts a piece of work which I should shun as a waste of strength, Henry shows, in his literary task. He has muscle, & ventures on & performs feats which I am forced to decline. In reading him, I find the same thought, the same spirit that is in me, but he takes a step beyond, & illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generality."[80]

The contemporary writer John Updike has found that Thoreau's literary voice "has worn better, to a modern ear, than Emerson's more fluent, worldly, and—to be expected from a former clergyman—oratorical one...The mood of Thoreau is more interior; the eye is not on an audience but on a multitudinous world of sensation, seen and named with precision."[81] If anything, Thoreau was more of a scholar than Emerson; he was more systematic in his reading and tried to master classical literature and philosophy in their original languages. Like Emerson, however, Thoreau was enamored of Kantian idealism; he was a natural scientist through and through, methodical in his researches, and drawn to close observation. Christian dogma meant next to nothing to Thoreau; he laughed off the arcane theological speculations and squabbles of even the most liberal Unitarians. Aristotle was in his genes, although Thoreau constantly tipped his hat to Plato, and often, in his journals, expressed anxieties that he lacked a taste for idealist flights of profundity.

Much of Thoreau's great popularity in the last decades of the nineteenth century was a result of his personal narrative style with its embedded epiphanies, like sudden glints of gold in a slurry pan, or quixotic revelations about man and nature—insights that sent shivers of recognition through his readers. Like his mentor Emerson, Thoreau was driven to distill the learning of the world into moments of personal clarity and crystalline form, from which both hoped to derive the grand synthesis of matter and spirit. But it was Thoreau who embodied the resolution of the dichotomy a generation later, and the Tonalists who developed a visual equivalent. It was Thoreau who, by embracing in his last years a Darwinian sense of the grand integrity of the universe, best expressed how the spirit-matter (ideal-real) dichotomy—the bugbear of nineteenth-century American theology—might be obliterated in the flow of change. For Thoreau, life's essential dynamic was harnessed along the fault lines of metamorphosis (the confluence of the material and spiritual); or as Thoreau might have it, metamorphosis is spirit and matter its creation. The human brain, then, in comprehending its fate yet remaining steadfast in its unflinching pursuit of meaning and wonder, is the crowning glory of creation.

This metamorphic dynamic lies at the heart of the Tonalist movement. Charles Darwin's demonstration that transmutation operated throughout the organic sphere was embraced—in its many varieties of evolutionary thinking—by much of late-Victorian America, certainly by the cultural elites of New York and Boston, even if the science was far from proven, because the theory addressed such pressing needs. By 1882 and at a well-attended testimonial dinner for Herbert Spencer at New York's Delmonico's restaurant, which included paeans of praise from one-time evangelical minister Henry Ward Beecher, Darwinism, especially its sociological ramifications, was acclaimed with an enthusiasm not seen again until the trumpeting of Marxism and Freud a half-century later. Harvard University's most famous scientist of the period, Louis Agassiz, who had resisted Darwinism and promoted the idea of separate creations, had been discredited. Devout followers of Darwin and Spencer included Andrew Carnegie, William Graham Sumner, Carl Schurz, and Asa Gray, a Harvard biology professor and traditional Christian, who was able to reconcile—and splendidly so—science and faith and the question of design in the natural world.[82]

For the late-Victorians, Darwin explained or explained away much. Darwinism was a solution waiting to happen. Before a complete understanding of genetics, and the role of chance variation, the theory of evolution might be vigorously debated, but for skeptics like Henry Adams, or William James—exemplified in his philosophy of pragmatism—the truth mattered less than a belief system that helped one get on with life. Adams confessed as much in his autobiography: "Henry Adams was the first in an infinite series to discover and admit to himself that he really did not care whether truth was, or was not, true. He did not even care that it should be proved true, unless the process were new and amusing. He was a Darwinist for fun."[83] Drawing on Emerson and Thoreau, and certainly, the poet Walt Whitman, James virtually dismissed the mind-spirit duality that plagued antebellum America, and boldly posited that emotion flows from the physical body. James insisted that the only ideas that matter are those that are tenable in life as we know it, and result in creative and positive change.

The horrors of the Civil War, which had destroyed respect for received wisdom and inflexible ideas, made possible this more flexible and fluid understanding of humankind's subjective response—the reciprocal response of perceiver and perceived—to the world: a dynamic rhythmic exchange of energy the Tonalist painters intuited in the very play of brush on canvas. Whether Inness found Darwin congenial or not, he certainly recognized the importance of this metamorphic dynamic to his art, as the artist made clear in an interview with the critic Sadakichi Hartmann: "'It always needs the same something,' he [Inness] exclaimed, 'in all the arts, whether you work as a painter, sculptor, architect [he accompanied each word with an expressive gesture] or as actor or dancer.' And the old gentleman actually got up and pirouetted about the room. 'You need rhythm,' he said, 'and that must come from within. It cannot be taught. It must be there,' and he pointed to his chest."[84]

Henry David Thoreau: The Sojourner's Mystical Journey

Emerson and Thoreau were ever in search of the ecstatic moment, the experience of standing outside of oneself and time, flowing body and soul into a timeless realm, at once material and spiritual. This longed-for ecstatic release—the banishment of the spiritual-material duality—though it might be conjured internally with poetry and mind experiments, was essentially an emanation of time and place kindled by memory. Such epiphanies of release and mystical union are sprinkled throughout the writings of Emerson and Thoreau. Both were exquisitely attuned to the path of mystical wonder, in which the eyes serve as a gateway to the soul, an experience prompted—and this, too, was crucial to the development of Tonalism—not by beauty alone, but through the emanating mystery and ambiguity of nature. This was key to the genius of Whistler, who preferred to hint at reality, while Inness was a master of controlled ambiguity, of striking just the right balance between readable detail and unreadable form. In this embrace of uncertainty and ambiguity these four, writers and artists, are unequivocally modern. No serious artist of the day could resist their gravitational pull.

Thoreau was a master at compressed ambiguity and laconic metaphor. His meanings are often manifold and shift and expand in the mind the more they are pondered. By embracing solitude and silence and lovingly sifting the visual data stored within, Thoreau opened up new vistas to be plumbed by artists and readers alike. Solitude was Thoreau's guide to the

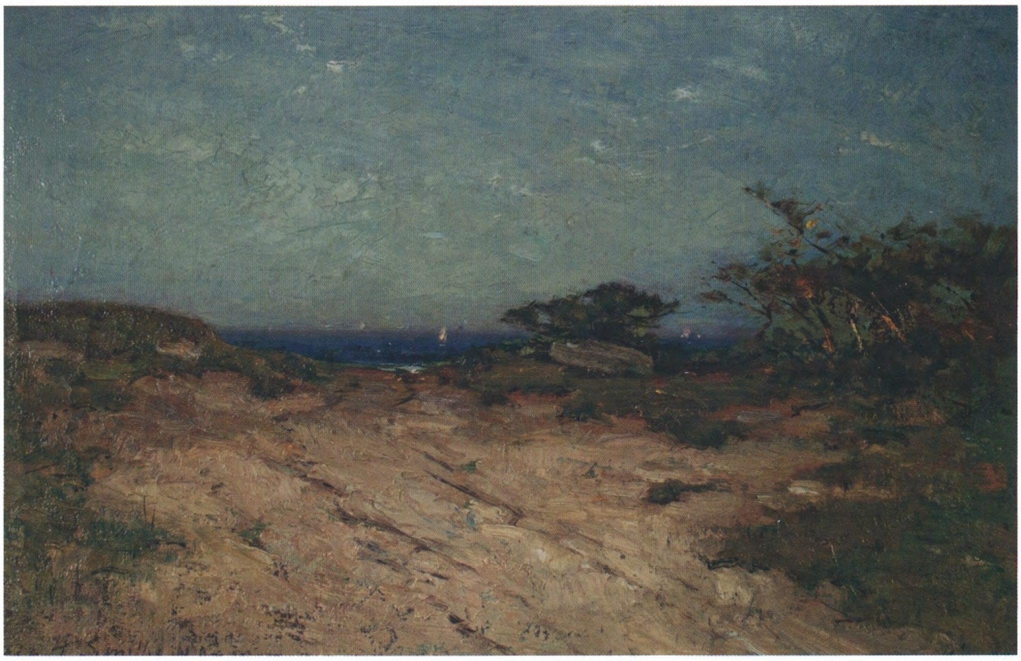


Fig. 7.17.3. George H. Smillie, *Road to the Sea, Marblehead Neck*, 1917. Oil on canvas, 9 x 14 in. Private collection.

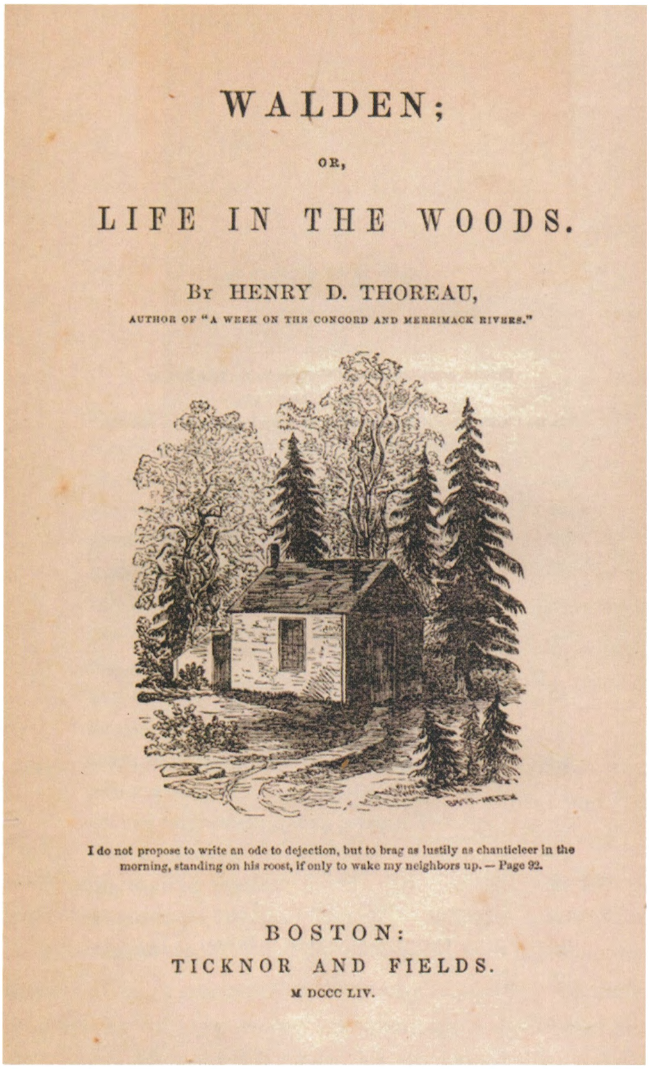
hard truths in nature. He was a truth seeker, or more precisely, a seeker of the experience of truth, rather than truth in the abstract. If Thoreau's influence was ultimately larger than that of Emerson—as it certainly is today—it is partially because the central myth of his life, his hermit-like retirement to Walden, touched on a universal metaphor: it mirrored older Christian exemplars of holiness in its removal from active life and combined it with more current interests in the ascetic life for religious or artistic purposes. All readers could find something of themselves in Thoreau's retreat from the world.

In 1908, Emma Bell Miles, in a poem titled "After Reading Thoreau," published in *The Century Magazine*, touched on the profound emotional experience the writings of Thoreau had on late-Victorian readers: "Last night into my house and heart, dense walled/A wingèd wind there blew;/Into dull ears and duller soul it called/A message strange and new. Pouring upon me a primeval youth,/A fresh and tonic stream, /It brought the certainty of innate truth/From worlds of which we dream. Out of a silence deep and undefiled/That wind forever springs,/The magic and the perfume of the wild Bearing on mighty wings...."[85] It is little wonder that such feelings led anyone and everyone who could afford it to escape the city in summer and take refuge in a country vacation spot. Naturalists like John Muir and John Burroughs (both avid disciples of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman) followed similar paths of solitary wanderings. The great landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and the nation's first head of the Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot, extolled the experience of solitude in the wilderness. Poets from John Greenleaf Whittier to Walt Whitman, and professional "spirit seekers" and health gurus like William Rounseville Alger and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, all proclaimed the virtues of the solitary life in the face of nature, and invoked the example and inspiration of Thoreau.

It is difficult to conceive of Frank Lloyd Wright's revolution in architecture with his Prairie style houses of the 1890s without the influence of Thoreau (and the Japanese art Wright discovered at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893). Wright relished Thoreau's writings. His domestic architecture, which integrated the interior and exterior of his homes into the surrounding landscape, allowing the free and fluid flow of light and the mutable intersection of organic forms, is informed throughout by Thoreau's sense of the integrated experience of nature, of a man-nature bond instrumental to well-being. Even Wright's feeling for low horizontal banding and sinuous rhythms in his designs evokes not just the prairie of his youth but also the soft undulating grassland and hills of the primordial savanna landscape. All, including the muted tonalities he favored in his designs and decorative furnishings, breathe the abstract and metamorphic spirit that informed turn-of-the-century Tonalism.

For those millions shaken by the indiscriminate slaughter of the Civil War, who found little consolation in the doctrines of traditional religion that allowed murderous evil to operate at the heart of God's plan, Thoreau provided an alternative consolation. Thoreau's writings, pervaded as they are with a haunting melancholy—his autumnal moods—stemming from his brother's wretched death, offered visionary glimpses into nature's beatitudes, where death and life walked close at hand. Thoreau is the poet of the lost and found, a pathfinder to reconcile man with his fate.

Thoreau's example for Tonalists like J. Francis Murphy, J. Frank Currier, Arthur Dow, Thomas Dewing, and Dwight



WALDEN;

OR,

LIFE IN THE WOODS.

By HENRY D. THOREAU,

AUTHOR OF "A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS."

I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up. — Page 92.

BOSTON:

TICKNOR AND FIELDS.

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Fig. 7.18. Frontispiece of the first edition of *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, 1854.

Tryon transcended philosophical or literary tropes: he was the poet who whispered to their inner souls. He saw like an artist; he led the life of an artist. Had Thoreau not been a writer, it is likely that he would have been an artist. After his death, his writings took on a life of their own, enchanting a nation and providing a safe harbor for Charles Darwin's insights by embodying them in a vernacular of naturalist poetry. Within twenty years of his death in 1863, Thoreau's writings had been published in large editions, filling the bookshelves of late-Victorian America. *Walden*, first published in 1854 (fig. 7.18), went through 134 editions by the turn of the century.[86] Long articles on Thoreau began regular appearances in *Scribner's Magazine* in the early 1880s and later in *The Century Magazine*. J. Francis Murphy identified so completely with Thoreau that as early as 1878, he was quoting Thoreau at length in his notebook: "In the spaces of thought are the reaches of land and water, where men go and come. The landscape lies far and fair within, and the deepest thinker is the furthest traveled."[87]

As has already been seen, reviewers and writers in the 1880s were constantly comparing Murphy to Thoreau. Two years before his death, Murphy made a pilgrimage to the site of Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond and transplanted a pine seedling to his Arkville studio in the Catskills. Murphy's first biographer, Eliot Clark, writing about Murphy's life in Arkville, regularly describes the artist in term of Thoreau: an artist in intimate and constant communion with the natural world on his doorstep, who could summon an old bass in a nearby pool simply by his approaching footsteps. "He was fond of backwoods ways, the easy life, the freedom from hurry and of indulging in his own manner of leisurely contemplation." Clark singled out Thoreau as the exemplar for artists of Murphy's generation. "Thoreau is the most pronounced embodiment of individualism and self independence. He is nourished on nature and lives in harmony with her ways and moods ... It is not merely an artistic caprice that painters come to like the tumbled down, the weeds and marshes, the unkempt fields, the wayward path. Signs not merely of the picturesque but of that deep revolt of man from the tyranny of oppressive form, and the yearning for reality in the simple and unadorned." In summarizing Murphy's relationship with nature, Clark suggests the essence of Thoreau's message: "All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself. The study of Murphy's work reveals the skillful picture maker finally discovering that in landscape man sees but the reflection of himself."[88] J. Francis Murphy's *The Clearing*, 1917 (see fig. 4.71), makes Clark's point abundantly clear. The painting is not about place but a state of mind; it is a landscape assembled out of the imagination; it is a landscape conceptualized in old age—Murphy was sixty-five—to portray, with the simplest of means, an approximation of nature's beloved physiognomy. Murphy, like Blakelock, sometimes left his prepared grounds outside to properly weather them, as if to drink in the sun and wind and rain. Every crack, fissure, flattened impasto plane, declivity, scumbled smear, and squiggled line reflects their maker.

In describing Murphy's intuitive relationship with nature, Clark was describing an entire generation of artists. Dwight Tryon, who spent more than half the year in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts, owned a copy of the ten-volume *Writings of Thoreau*, published in 1894–95, and wrote to a friend that reading Thoreau's essays was "like seeing nature itself," calling Thoreau the "best landscape '*word*' painter." Tryon's biographer, Henry White, who was also a Tonalist painter, noted that *Walden* was the artist's Bible.[89] Thomas Dewing and his circle of writers and artists who summered in Cornish, New Hampshire, were steeped in Emerson and Thoreau. His wife, Maria Dewing, an extraordinary painter of Tonalist still lifes, wrote a book on interior decoration, *Beauty in the Household* (1882), which was filled with paraphrases of Thoreau and Emerson, and advised on household decorations that included Tonalist landscapes and employed color schemes derived from the Tonalist palette—

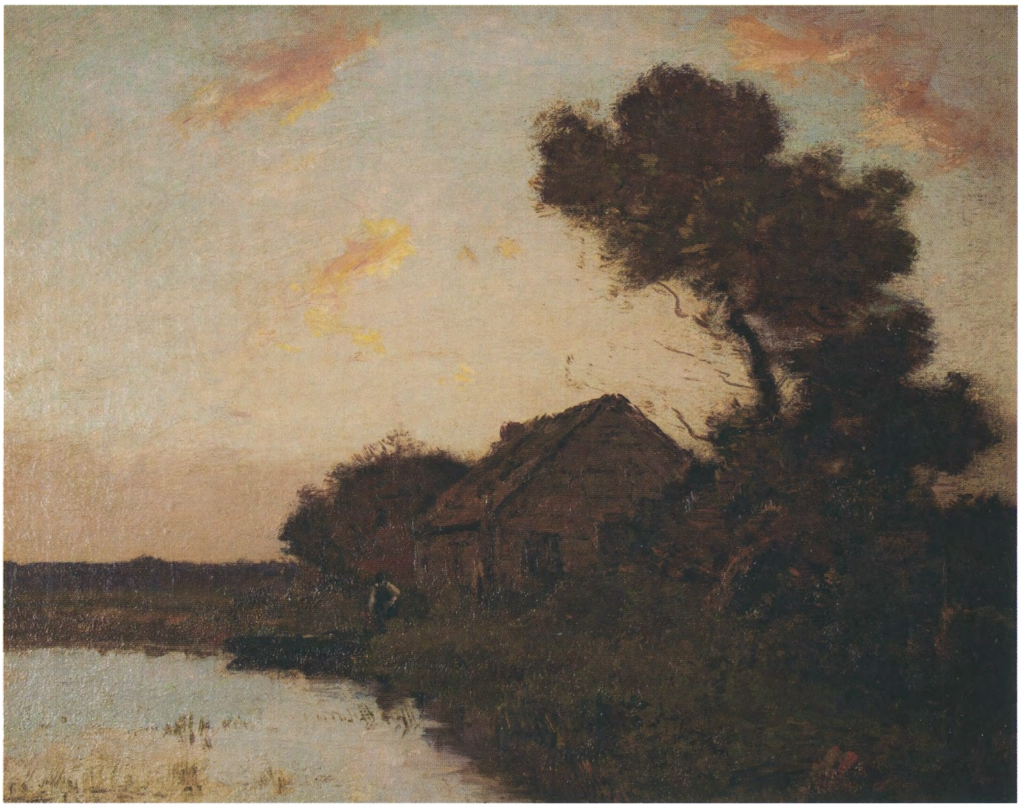


Fig. 7.18.1. Frederick W. Kost, *East Moriches, Long Island*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 16 x 20 in. Private collection.

opalescent pearls, moonstones, turquoises, and chalcedonies, that were suggestive of dream states and mystical raptures.[90]

The expatriate artist J. Frank Currier referred to Thoreau more than anyone else in his first European diaries, having developed a taste for the writer as an adolescent. Perhaps no artist so thoroughly incorporated Thoreau's insights into expressive visual equivalents as did Currier. Ralph Albert Blakelock was certainly exposed to Thoreau through the Spiritualist circles he frequented. George Inness probably knew Emerson and Thoreau's writings as well as his beloved Swedenborg (the artist's library was destroyed in a fire so there is no record of what it contained). In addition, the enormously influential Tonalist artist and teacher Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922) devoured American Romantic writers like Thoreau, Poe, and Whitman in the early 1880s. Even Childe Hassam, a confirmed, convinced Impressionist who occasionally strayed into the precincts of Tonalism, found Thoreau congenial, once noting to a friend, "I read Thoreau quite often. I can always read Thoreau. There is a lot of the desert in Thoreau and a great deal of the ocean! Big places."[91] In a commemorative essay on his friend and fellow artist John Twachtman, Hassam wrote: "Twachtman was a boy in the sunlight; and Thoreau, that other remarkable landscapist and pleinaerist in words, says somewhere that 'the Greeks were boys in the sunlight,' and to me that is a complete description of the Greek nature."[92] Later artists who employed Tonalism, such as Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, and Milton Avery, were all devotees of Thoreau.

Thoreau: The Writing Life and the Artistic Life

Thoreau's appeal for artists—to this day—goes well beyond the central visible trope of the Tonalist landscape: the nearby hermitage of unspoiled nature at Walden Pond; it is found in the dynamic of discovery at the heart of Thoreau's writings. In Charles Warren Eaton's painting *Quiet Shore*, circa 1885 (see fig. 5.103), for example, it is the astonishing dissection of flat contiguous tones and their melodic transcription that constitutes the true wonder of the artwork, rather than the ravishing subject itself. What artist would not be thrilled to discover Thoreau's description in a single paragraph in his journal of 1861 of a dozen "various shades of green" of the cultivated grasses ("rich glaucous green; flashing blades of corn; yellowing tops of ripening grain; uniform red of red-top; purple of the fowl-meadow; very dark and dusky, as it were shadowy green of herd's grass; dark purple or slaty purple; fresh light green; fresh dark green; hard, dark green of pastures; light-colored wiry fescue"). Describing autumn tints reflected on Walden Pond in 1857, Thoreau wrote: "The effect of this prolongation of the reflection was a very pleasing softening and blending of the colors, especially when a small brush of one bright tint stood directly before another of a contrary and equally bright tint. It was just as if you were to brush firmly aside with your hand or brush a fresh line of paint of various colors, or so many lumps of friable colored powders...Walden, too, like an Indian maiden, wears this broad rainbow-like belt of brilliant-colored points or cones round her waist in October. The color seems to be reflected and re-reflected from ripple to ripple, losing brightness each time by the softest possible gradation, and tapering toward the beholder, since he occupies a mere point of view."[93] Thoreau's combination of technical observations, probably inspired by John Ruskin (1819–1900), replete with similes and metaphors, would have captivated any artist. Although the popular image of Thoreau is seated by his cabin, his modus was one of constant sauntering and observation: he literally collected in his journal visual tropes of natural patterns, angles of vision, and observations of light textures. It was an achievement both systematic and sensitive to the most exquisite variations and modulations of his ephemeral quarry.

Even the way Thoreau went about writing bore a resemblance to the working habits of the artist. Thoreau methodically developed and refined his manuscripts, assembling field notes from his walks and observations from his readings (most from classical and European sources of natural science, religion, and philosophy), arranging the material in journals; then at a later date, through the prism of memory and remove—feelings recollected in tranquility, as the poet William Wordsworth phrased it—he synthesized his various sources and rewriting to produce his finished works. The methodology was almost a mirror image of the working process George Inness followed in his late synthetic paintings. Inness virtually assembled his paintings out of memory, employing the myriad facts of things—trees, plants, weather, atmosphere (the mere details of nature)—which he employed with the ease of a writer's extensive vocabulary, until he had succeeded in intensifying his visual poetry and the evocation of an otherworldly reality. Again, like the compositional unity imposed on Thoreau's *Walden* by compressing years of experience and observation into the narrative cycle of a single year and four seasons, thus giving the work a synergistic symbolic power (Walden went through seven drafts—again, not unlike Inness's constant repaintings), the carrying power of Inness's best painting embodied a unity of voice (tonal unity), a formal harmony, and a cumulative visual impact based on the overall design and embedded patterns (both of composition and surface facture), and ultimately a symbolic vitality (Swedenborgian correspondences): haunting, mysterious, and expressive of an intuited unseen reality. In many respects, Inness embodied Swedenborg's spiritual flights on canvas in much the same way Thoreau embedded Emerson's idealist musings in the concrete metaphors of his books and journals—all drawn directly from actual experience of the physical world. Both Inness and Thoreau translated perceived reality into artistic or aesthetic reality. Similarly, Charles Melville Dewey, in *Afternoon Shadows*, circa 1888 (see fig. 6.26), transformed the prosaic picturesque into a mirage of diaphanous light-veils. The artist, like the poet, is—in the sphere of human consciousness—the ultimate arbiter of metamorphosis.

The fit of Thoreau's passing observations with artistic practice and perception was far from serendipitous. Thoreau was well acquainted with the artists of his day and even more so with works on artistic theory and instruction by such writer-artists as John Ruskin and William Gilpin (1724–1804). His journals are replete with similes and metaphors drawn from picture making, often commenting on how natural forms make perfect framing devices. "I walk over the hills, to compare great things with small, as through a gallery of pictures, ever and anon looking through a gap in the woods, as through the frame of a picture, to a more distant wood or hillside, painted with several more coats of air. It is a cheap but pleasant effect. To a landscape in pictures, glassed with air."[94] He frequently noted and commented on the observations of artists and art critics in his journals. For example, in a journal entry of January 8, 1854, Thoreau refers to Gilpin's *Art of Sketching the Landscape*, in which the author recommends laying in a tinted wash over a drawing to achieve a harmonious unity. "I have often been attracted by this harmonious tint in his and other drawings, and sometimes, especially, have observed it in nature when at sunset I inverted my head. We love not so well the landscape represented as in broad noon, but in a morning or evening twilight, those seasons when the imagination is most active, the more hopeful or pensive seasons of the day. Our mood may then possess the whole landscape, or be in harmony with it, as the hue of twilight prevails over the whole scene. Are we more than crepuscular in our intellectual and spiritual life? Have we awakened to broad noon? The morning hope is soon lost in what becomes the routine of the day, and we do not recover ourselves again until we land on the pensive shores of evening, shores which skirt the great western continent of the night. At sunset we look into the west."[95]

Thoreau's familiarity with English watercolor technique, specifically, the process of laying in tonal washes to obtain unity of effect, prefigures the efflorescence of the Tonalist watercolor in America in the late 1880s. (Whistler's Nocturnes of the 1870s, using thin washes of oil, appropriated English watercolor technique to get the feel of broad fields of color tone.) William Gilpin's books on art and the picturesque, along with Ruskin's writings, refined Thoreau's visualization of landscape; Thoreau became much more sensitive to framing devices, color variations, and tone gradations in his journal entries. "The prevailing color of the woods, at present, excepting the evergreens, is russet, a little more red or grayish, as the case may be, than the earth, for those are the colors of the withered leaves and the branches: the earth has the lighter hue of withered grass. Let me see how soon the woods will have acquired a new color."[96] Gilpin changed and intensified Thoreau's perception until by the early 1850s, Thoreau was viewing the environs of Concord the way an artist might seek out moments of rare color harmonies. Then, in the autumn of 1857, Thoreau's sensitivity to tonal variations in nature was further spurred by his reading of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and, crucially, Ruskin's primer on art, *Elements of Drawing* (1857). Thoreau was attracted not only to Ruskin's ideas about social or artistic reform but also to the writer's insights into artistic perception and the process of seeing. Ruskin thought seeing more important than drawing: "[E]verything that you can see in the world around you, presents itself to your eyes only as an arrangement of patches of different colors variously shaded...We *see* nothing but flat colours...The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called *the innocence of the eye*: that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify,—as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight."[97] Thoreau biographer Robert Richardson notes that Ruskin demonstrated to Thoreau, "how all colors in nature are gradated, never solid, but always shading lighter or darker, brighter or duller, from one hue to another, and Thoreau copied one of Ruskin's key observations into his natural history notebook. 'The victorious beauty of the rose as compared with other flowers, depends wholly on the delicacy and quantity of its colour gradations, all other flowers being either less rich in gradations, not having so many folds of leaf; or less tender, being patched and veined instead of flushed.'"[98]

Ruskin's colorist insights into the complementary use of tone, which influenced Monet and Seurat, and must certainly have been known to Inness, Hunt, and La Farge, further refined Thoreau's eye, resulting in some of his most nuanced nature writing. It is noteworthy, too, that Ruskin had anticipated the discoveries of evolutionary biology that posited the adaptation of human eyesight to register subtle color variations, especially in subdued light. Ruskin was a great admirer of the English painters John Constable and J.M.W. Turner, and it is Turner's way of seeing that he championed.[99] And in turn, Thoreau, without knowing Constable or Turner firsthand, began rhapsodizing about landscape in broad painterly terms. "Nature loves gradation," wrote Thoreau in his journal in the fall of 1857. From then on he would find tints of color everywhere, observations that would find their way into one of his greatest essays, "Autumnal Tints" (1859). Thoreau was seeing like a Tonalist painter. By 1888, Charles Warren Eaton in his *Autumn Meadow* (fig. 7.19), could tease out Thoreau's manifold greens hovering like an airy dream over his Bloomfield meadow.

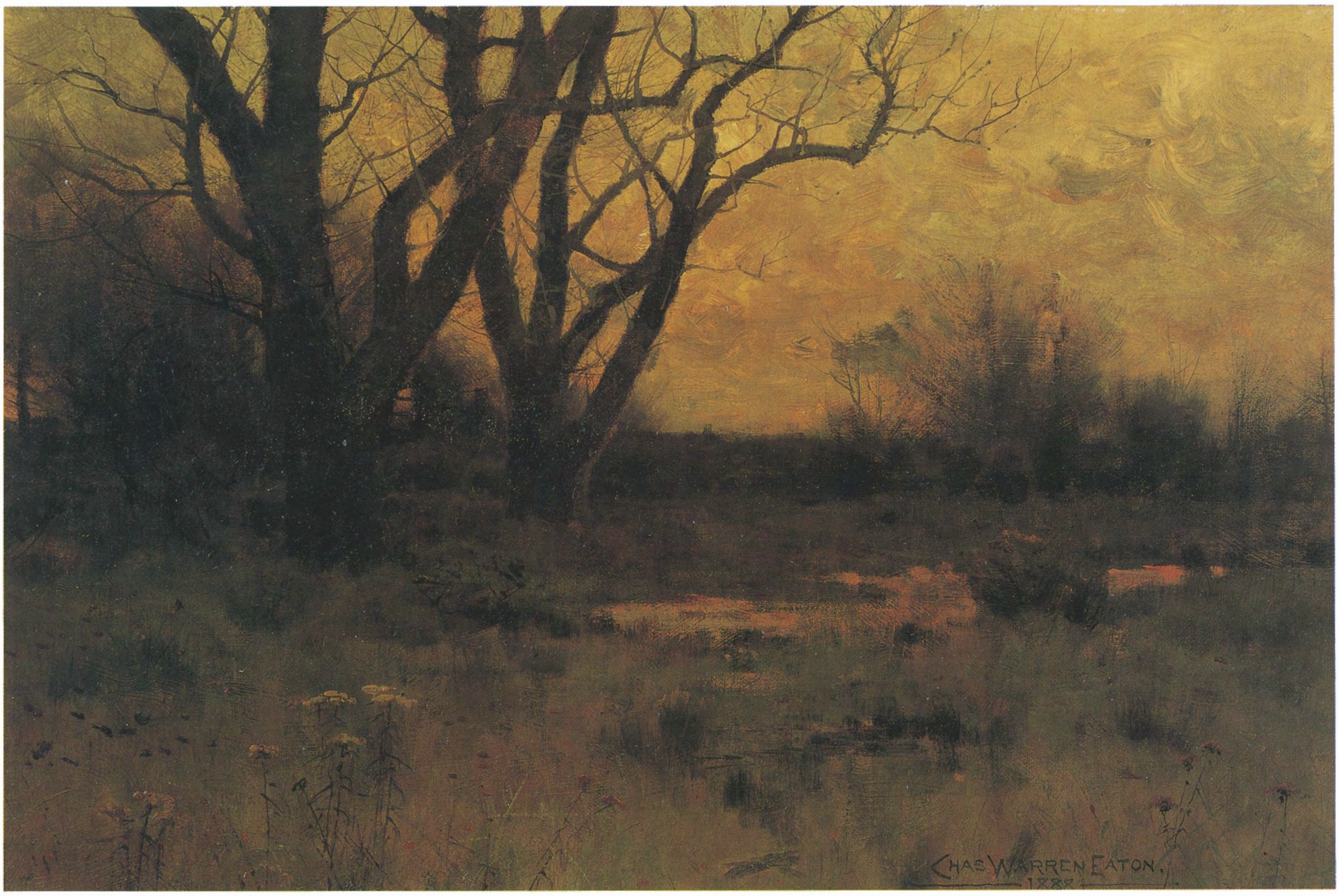


Fig. 7.19. Charles Warren Eaton, *Autumn Meadow*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Private collection.

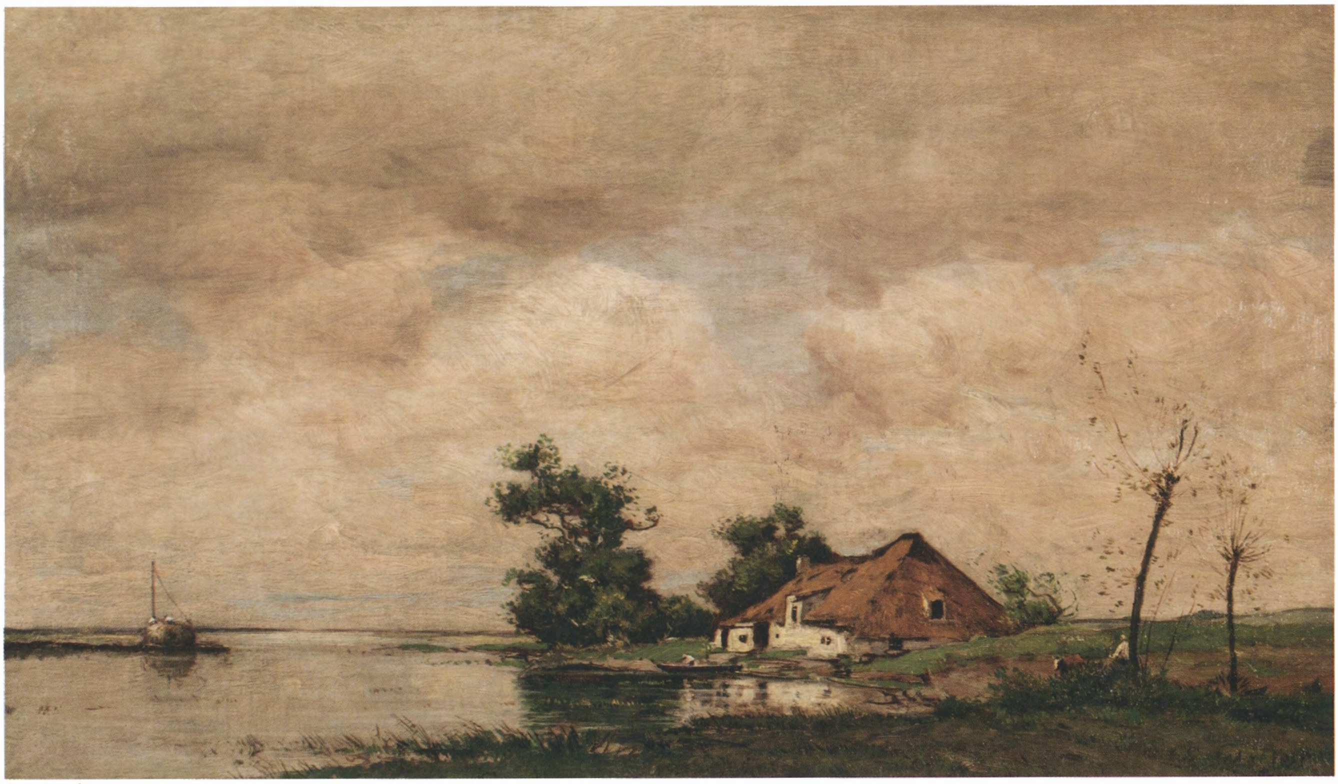


Fig. 7.20. Frederick W. Kost, *Dutch Sky*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 14 x 24 in. Private collection.

Thoreau and Nature's Concealed Narrative: The Dynamic of Metamorphosis and the Use of Soft-edged Forms to Foster a Sense of Ambiguity, Uncertainty, and Mystery

On a deeper level still, Ruskin's insights led Thoreau to an even more profound appreciation of the importance of perception in and of itself—of seeing "rightly," and thus digging into the mantle of nature, sometimes literally, for the spirit therein. Beyond the verbal richness of his Tonalist exposition of fall colors in "Autumnal Tints" is Thoreau the seeker, who sums up his argument in regard to acuity of vision: "[Y]ou surely *will* see, and much more, if you are prepared to see it,—if you *look* for it... Objects are concealed from our view, not so much because they are out of the course of our visual ray, as because we do not bring our minds and eyes to bear on them... [thus] the greater part of the phenomena of Nature are for this reason concealed from us all our lives."[100] The prepared mind—the heart and attentive eye—is all. By equipping himself with Ruskin's tools of perception, Thoreau was better prepared, just as his life was running out, to bridge the divide between the material and spiritual that so preoccupied his and Emerson's generation as it made the transition from harsh Calvinism to Unitarianism and like-minded creeds of liberal Protestantism. In this, Thoreau uncannily anticipates the experience of the Tonalist artists of a generation later who would go to Europe to train, or the indigenous Tonalists who learned European principles of design and painterly expression from the returning expatriates; and who then translated that technique into a distinctive American style by immersing themselves in the felicities of home ground. Such a transition can be seen in works by Frederick W. Kost, such as *Dutch Sky*, circa 1890 (fig. 7.20), and the later *Sunset on the James*, circa 1910 (fig. 7.21). *Dutch Sky*, for all its airy loveliness, might be mistaken for the work of a European artist of the day with its picturesque narrative details and conventional perspective; while in *Sunset on the James*, though seemingly picturesque at first glance, the narrative is reduced to a necessary minimum, and the compositional focus has been compressed and flattened so that the landscape elements are transformed into pure patterns of variegated color—the mundane of observed reality has been reconfigured into a plangent metaphor, the fading light of sunset into a spiritualized icon of mystical remove.

As Kost and his Tonalist colleagues would do a half-century later, Thoreau drew on the insights of inherited tradition—of Gilpin and Ruskin—to reimagine or reenvision the here-and-now of his own life and time. Thoreau's landscapes are not just American landscapes because they describe Concord but because they describe a way of seeing that is peculiarly American. Robert Richardson has pointed out that the final drafts of Thoreau's masterpiece, *Walden*, were conceived in the perceptual insights of four European sources. "Darwin, Cato, Linnaeus, and Gilpin all have in common an intense focus on the earth and its productions: Darwin for the distribution and differentiation of species; Cato, as good as a nineteenth-

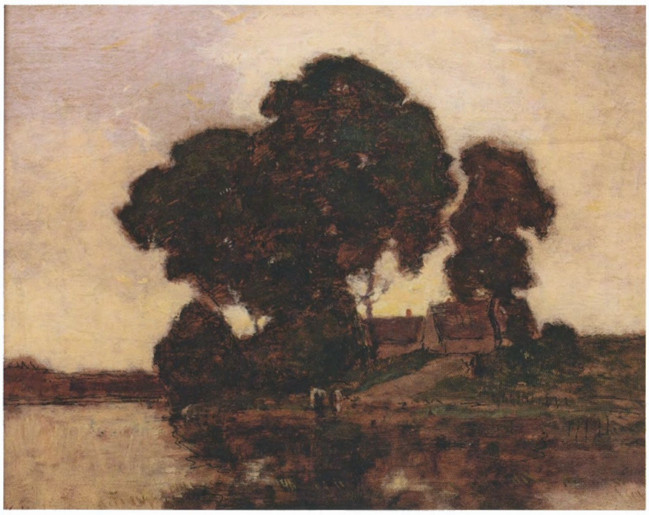


Fig. 7.21. Frederick W. Kost, *Sunset on the James*, c. 1910. Oil on panel, 13 x 16 in. Private collection.

century farmer's handbook; Linnaeus on minute classification of plants and parts of plants; Gilpin on seeing and describing the larger arrangement of elements in landscape. These were Thoreau's great writers as he turned now to work on the second half of his man-in-nature theme."[101] But without his method of constant observation in the outdoors, often working for weeks on end as a surveyor, or employing his naturalist's instinct for the inductive scrutinizing of natural phenomena, Thoreau would never have registered the extraordinary insights he did—something, Emerson, with all his deductive insights, could never quite equal.

Thoreau wore his influences lightly, taking what he needed from the past in refining his central message of a renewal and rededication of our lives to higher things. Like Emerson, the prophetic voice was always strong in Thoreau, and *Walden* was less an argument for social or economic reform and more a guide to the saving of the soul and a call for spiritual rebirth. Following Emerson, Thoreau believed that social change, even political reform, happened one individual at a time, by virtue of the light of truth kindled in the human soul. In the same way, Charles de Kay in all his reformist writing about art reflected this stance of Emerson and Thoreau: true art, innovative art, flowed from the expression of the individual conscience.

Even with his extensive borrowings, Thoreau's methodology was his own, much of it conceived out of the creative dynamic between observing—moving over the same old roads again and again and again—and writing (paralleling the creative dynamic between the artist's eye and hand). The recording of physical data was his preferred starting point for ferreting out the organic interconnectedness—the dynamic interchange—of all living things on earth, what he called the "grammar" of nature. His study of the Greeks, especially the Stoics, had convinced him that the whole earth is alive and pulsing with energy, a vital energy manifest in all natural forms. Ovid, too, inspired Thoreau to be open to the ceaseless forces of change and metamorphosis: "For that which once existed is no more, and that which was not has come to be; and so the whole round of motion is gone through again."[102]

Thoreau's most famous observation along such Ovidian lines was his description of the sandy railway cutting at Walden Pond. In the process of freezing and thawing, mysterious patterns of sand foliage appeared on the bank of the cutting, resulting in this comment from Thoreau in his journal of December 1851: "These things suggest that there is motion in the earth as well as on the surface; it lives and grows… The earth I tread on is not a dead, inert mass. It is a body, has a spirit, is organic."[103] In the famous and central chapter of *Walden*, "Spring," Thoreau's earlier observation of the sand foliage has become a symbol of the generative force that brings all life into being. "The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flowers and fruit,—not a fossil earth, but a living earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and vegetable life is merely parasitic."[104] Thoreau's fascination with such natural phenomena became a legacy to his legions of readers, and reappears in new guises, such as Chauncey Ryder's painting *Etaples*, of 1902, in which the artist takes as his subject the stratified geology of an eroded hillside (fig 7.22).

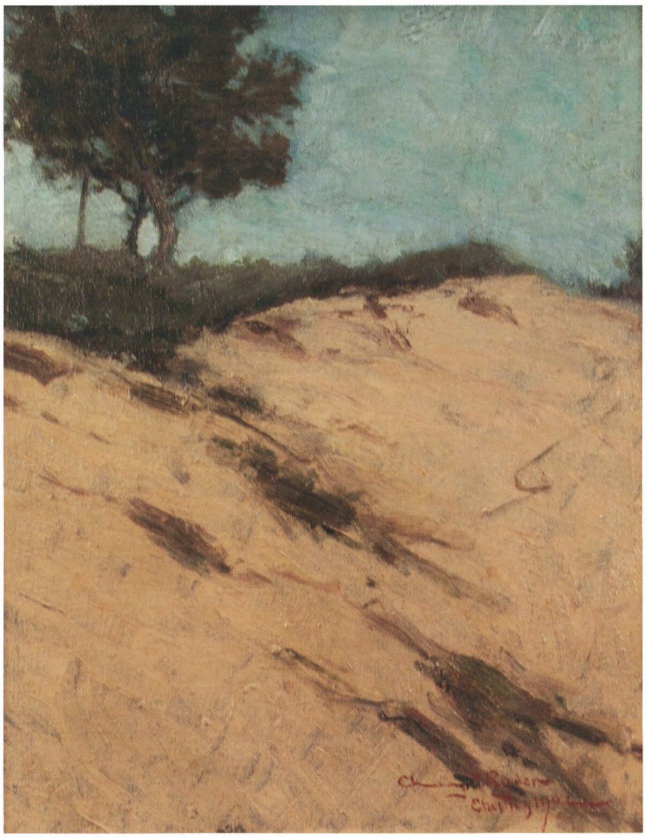


Fig 7.22. Chauncey Ryder, *Etaples*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 13 x 11 in. Private collection.

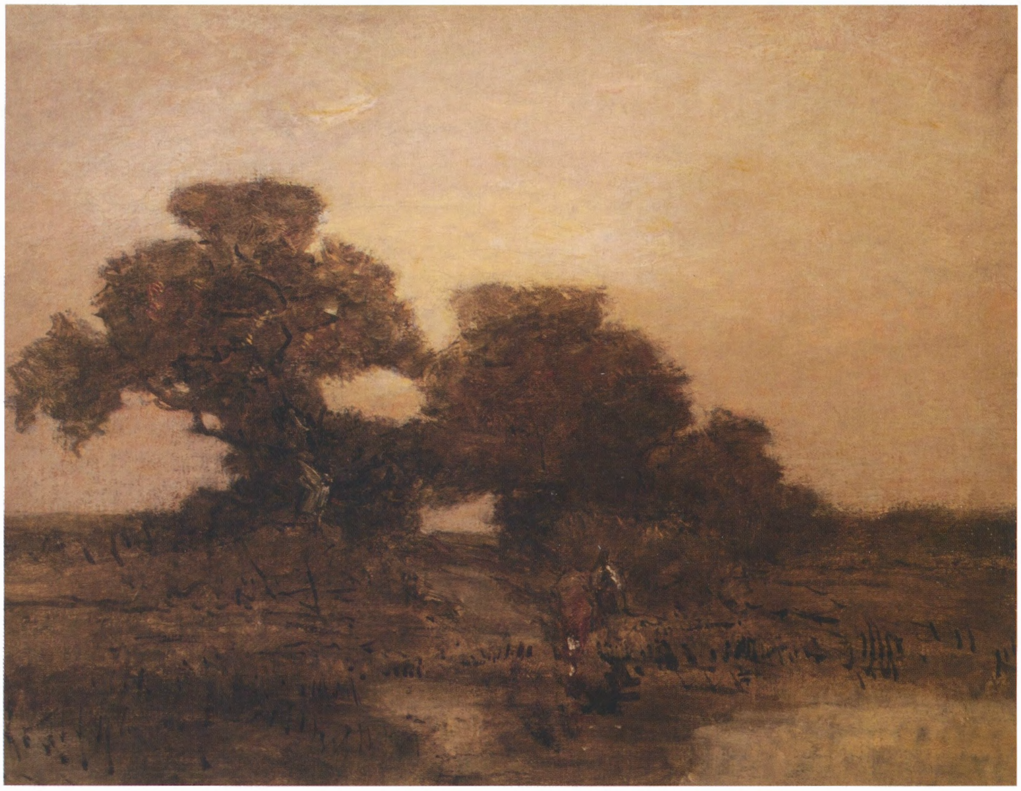


Fig. 7.23. Frederick W. Kost, *Watering Horses*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 22 x 28 in. Private collection.

The spirit of Ovid and metamorphosis is everywhere in Thoreau's mellifluous poetry, and explains why his texts could so easily absorb a Darwinian interpretation. It is little wonder that the Tonalists found a fellow and leading spirit in Thoreau, who approached nature as a scientist, but framed his observations first in the language of art, and then refined them, pushing them to reflect a larger spiritual meaning and encompassing unity: the great central life of the earth that encompasses everything we can know. For Thoreau, mere perception of data was never enough; the perceiver and the data of perception entered into a mysterious relationship, a mystical union that elicited a deeper, though uncertain and ambiguous, truth. In this, Thoreau was not only tapping into the understandings of the Greeks—that nature was force and energy—and the pre-literate Indian cultures he so admired, but he anticipated aspects of Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, that anything we observe cannot remain unchanged by that observation: "Natural science does not simply describe and explain nature; it is part of the interplay between nature and ourselves . . . What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning."[105] Thoreau's mystical imperative to seek what lay behind appearances literally drove him out of doors in search of observations that he could, in a sense, internalize and make his own by an intuitive grasp. "I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that *is* which *appears* to be."[106]

Every Tonalist painter who read these words would have understood his quest: their expressive handling of paint was a visualizing equivalence—a visceral means to penetrate to the heart of nature's felt life. As the art writer John Berger has pointed out, this achievement was key to the modernist enterprise. "Nature in the picture is no longer something laid out in front of the spectator for him to examine. It now includes him and the evidence of his senses and his constantly changing relationships to what he is seeing. Before Cézanne, every painting was to some extent like a view seen through a window. Courbet had tried to open the window and climb out. Cézanne broke the glass. The room became part of the landscape, the viewer part of the view."[107] The increasing use by Tonalists from the late 1870s on, especially in the works of Currier, Twachtman, and Inness, of fluid soft-edged forms to further enhance the sense of fluid ambiguity, uncertainty, and all-encompassing mystery in the landscape followed, directly or indirectly, from Thoreau's insights and encouragement to peer behind the veil of nature. In a painting like Frederick W. Kost's *Watering Horses*, circa 1910 (fig. 7.23), the viewer would be hard-pressed to obtain a realistic read on the horses, mere paint marks meshed with a thousand others, and they are immaterial to the abstract themes of this dusk-haunted landscape. The musical rhythm of the forms is the real subject, more akin to poetry than prose, uncannily describing Thoreau's twilight realm in which the material and spiritual coalesce in very process of metamorphosis—where the viewer has become part of the view.

The success of Tonalism as a style, its triumph over the Hudson River School, was largely the result of this newly evolved painterly technique, an expressive adaptation that mimicked the look and feel of forms through atmosphere, in turn allowing the artist to tap into his own reciprocating energies. At the same time, actual details began to be viewed as hindrances to an intuitive understanding, stumbling blocks to an expressive art, or as Thoreau wrote in his journal, "Facts should only be as the frame to my pictures."[108] (As Emerson observed: "The details, the prose of nature he should omit, and give us only the spirit and splendor.") Facts alone dismayed Thoreau because of his deep skepticism of dry scientific categories; he was haunted by the recurring sensation, wherever he gazed, that there was some overarching web of relationships that provided a kind of universal gravitational field that directed all things. He was dubious that science on its own could explain nature's essential dynamic. Before a full understanding of genetics, Darwin's theories remained just that: tantalizing theories.

Thoreau's quest to grasp this suspected and yet elusive dynamic—what physicists would later call a unified theory of everything—drove him to prodigious research in the final decade of his life after leaving Walden. Just as Darwin's ideas were beginning to filter into his ken, he set out to plumb his Concord landscape as never before. He combed his home territory from every angle of perception and every kind of weather, day and night, just as Ben Foster tramped his Cornwall Hollow hills fifty years later. Thoreau discovered that perception often had less to do with geographic vantage points, and the weighing and measuring of physical properties, and more with variations of natural light (what a physicist might describe in terms of wave energy). The paradox, so Thoreau realized, was that his vision seemed even more acute in terms of detecting form and color under subdued light in mist, sunset, and moonlight. The connections he detected in the natural world seemed to be contained in the very stuff of the atmosphere that enfolded them. This counterintuitive revelation, flying in the face of the bright light of science, or the sunny disposition of the Impressionists some twenty years later, profoundly energized Thoreau in his last decade. What had begun as a scientific quest based on European artistic, philosophical, and scientific sources was now transformed into a subjective journey, informed as much by internal mood as external reality.

What Thoreau could not know, nor could his avid followers, was that he had tapped into an innate human capacity, an evolutionary predisposition to acutely register form and color under subdued lighting conditions; and with this came the inherent feeling of ambiguity, uncertainty, and mystery such an enhanced response to twilight conditions produced in the nineteenth-century mind, without scientific advances in optics or evolutionary biology to draw upon. Lowered light, in which the higher-frequency spectrum of colors from green to blue reads more clearly, especially in denser air, allowed Thoreau to better sound the boundary zone of the material and spiritual—the metamorphic flash point of his inspiration—and so tap into feelings both personal and universal. Aesthetics had trumped logic and opened a window onto a seamless realm of transcendent joy—a world at once past, present, and future.

Thoreau: The Old Roads and the Pleasures of the Intimate Landscape of Solitude, Silence, and Memory

In the years after his stay at Walden Pond, Thoreau's observations gained a hidden dimension, a kind of fluid, dynamic interchange between inductive and deductive mind experiments: one moment in his journal he is describing a thesis developed from the minutest details of observation, like a naturalist; the next moment he is reformulating the data through the suggestive mind of a mystic. In effect, the aesthetic eye and the mystic-naturalist eye begin merging with the data of perception. As Thoreau grew older, so the accumulation of memory and sorrow began to act as a kind of emotional scrim for his observations. His systematic sojourns around Concord described in his journals, collecting plant specimens and squirreling up anecdotes for his never-completed book on the dispersal of seeds, took on a sometimes melancholy air, straying often into philosophical flights of fancy. Tramping the old roads of his hometown, Thoreau revealed in his journals, not just the path of his quest, but the concealed narrative of Tonalism. "Now I yearn for one of those old, meandering, dry, uninhabited roads, which lead away from towns, which lead us away from temptation, which conduct to the outside of earth, over its uppermost crust; where you may forget in what country you are traveling; where no farmer can complain that you are treading down his grass, no gentleman who has recently constructed a seat in the country that you are trespassing; on which you can go off at half-cock and wave adieu to the village; along which you may travel like a pilgrim, going nowhither; where travelers are not too often to be met; where my sprit is free; where the walls and fences are not cared for; where your head is more in heaven than your feet are on earth; which have long reaches where you can see the approaching traveler half a mile off and be prepared for him; not so luxuriant a soil as to attract men; some root and stump fences which do not need attention; where travelers have no occasion to stop, but pass along and leave you to your thoughts; where it makes no odds which way you face, whether you are going or coming, whether it is morning or evening, mid-noon or midnight; where earth is cheap enough by being public; where you can walk and think with least obstruction, there being nothing to measure progress by; where you can pace when your breast is full, and cherish your moodiness; where you are not in false relations with men, are not dining nor conversing with them; by which you may go to the uttermost parts of the earth ... The saunterer wears out no road, even though he travel on it, and therefore should pay no highway, or rather *low* way, tax ... There I can walk, and recover the lost child that I am without any ringing of a bell."[109]

Thoreau's uninhabited roads became a staple of the Tonalist landscape (see Frederick W. Kost, *A Stack Yard, Brookhaven*, c. 1910 [fig. 7.24]; Chauncey Ryder, *Road to Francistown*, c. 1910 [fig. 7.25]; and Charles Warren Eaton, *The Road to Sluis, Holland*, c. 1910 [fig. 7.26]), evoking a range of emotions from nostalgia to wonder, sadness to curiosity, immemorial feelings that resisted prosaic analysis and so retained a spellbinding power of attraction, or, to paraphrase Thoreau, to suffer love's attraction.

The place Thoreau describes along a defunct road is more a state of mind than an actual place. And since the saunterer wears out no road, he has become invisible to himself; in memory and imagination only the landscape remains, aloof and inviolate and undisturbed by his footsteps. Such mystical oneness (the spiritual equivalence of Emerson's transparent eyeball experienced by pre-literate cultures) is what allows the truly perceptive soul to detect the hidden pattern-structures of the organic world, in turn producing the subjective mood that elicits nature's symbolic language, and most dramatically, in the dimming light of day, the ability to feel the movement, the ceaseless metamorphosis of things as the sunset fades and night's spirit begins to haunt the observer. This is why so many turn-of-the-century reviews of Tonalist landscapes offer less about the painting's subject and more about the mood they engender. Tonalist light, acting like invisible waves of energy, bonds the viewer to the thing observed; the experience of the artwork mirrors the actual experience of the artist: memory, like light, has been transformed into an activated valence between the observed and the observer. As the 1880s turned into the 1890s and then the turn of the century, Tonalists increasingly adopted a dramatic, expressive, and graphic reading of natural forms, projecting an immediacy of emotional experience that could be discerned by the viewer at distance and on first glimpse (a criterion de Kay points out constantly in his positive reviews). Such immediacy of powerful feeling was George Inness's paramount goal.

Thoreau's love of these old, often abandoned roads—especially as he began to travel them at dusk and in moonlight—resulted in a kind of covalent bonding of the mystical, aesthetic, and nostalgic, which prompted, too, the writer's reverent contemplation of the old cellar holes of Concord's former inhabitants, marked, if not singled out, by still-blooming lilac hedges. For Thoreau these gaps and absences, these moribund roads and the homesteads of families who had moved on, moved west, or who had taken up jobs in mill-town factories, shaped how he perceived the landscape—not the details so much as the atmosphere of memory that permeated his

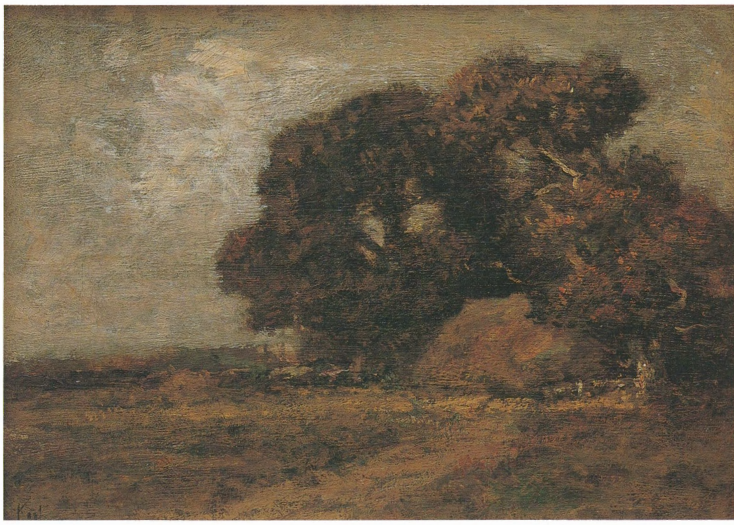


Fig. 7.24. Frederick W. Kost, *A Stack Yard, Brookhaven*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in. Private collection.

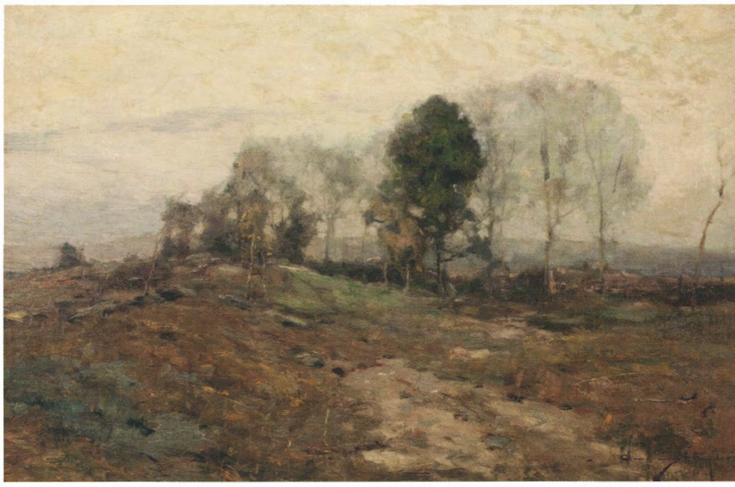


Fig. 7.25. Chauncey Ryder, *Road to Francistown*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 20 x 29 in. Private collection.

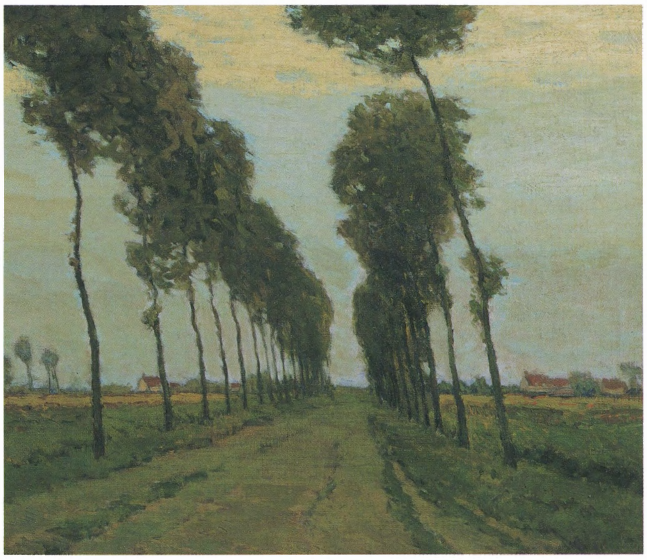


Fig. 7.26. Charles Warren Eaton, *The Road to Sluis, Holland*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 19 x 23 in. Private collection.

reflections. Thoreau's responses to such signs of immemorial habitation, and those of his readers, who have flocked to Concord ever since to visit Thoreau's stomping grounds, may be rooted in instincts of ancient lineage. According to the contemporary philosopher Denis Dutton, the appeal of old roads and overgrown homesteads goes deeper than nostalgia. As he has recently pointed out in *The Art Instinct*, evolutionary biologists have theorized that mildly complex landscapes have an innate appeal, especially those characterized by "coherence and legibility: terrain that provides orientation and invites exploration. A sense of a natural or man-made path is the most common cue for exploration, along with a surface that is even enough for walking."[110]

In Thoreau's day, the abandoned roads figured even more prominently than they do today, when major expressways pass within a hundred yards of Walden Pond. Because the area had been so widely timbered out by the 1840s, much more of the landscape was visible. With only a scattering of overgrown copses and woodlots, along with the shimmering faces of small ponds and the sinuous curves of the Assabett and Sudbury rivers converging to form the Concord River, the town offered a prospect not unlike the plentiful savannas first populated by our ancestors. Ubiquitous huckleberry patches and windfall apples from the many roadside orchards made Concord an inviting place, as it had for the Indians who had first fished along the banks of its rivers, whose overgrown trails Thoreau liked to explore. These trails, along with the old roads and winding riverbank paths and deserted farms, added another element to Concord's charms, a melancholy that was as much about the mystery of man's transitory lot as the fragility of his works. Thoreau was himself deeply moved by the most recent transients: the Irish laborers brought in to build the Fitchburg railway that passed nearby Walden Pond. He bought the boards and nails of one laborer's shanty, using the lumber to build his cabin at Walden. Thoreau guiltily pondered the fate of Collins, his wife, and newborn, as they vacated their dirt floor hovel at the crack of dawn with all their worldly possessions—bed, gilt framed looking glass, coffee mill, and hens—carried in a bundle on Collins's back. Derelict reminders of such abandoned lives appear throughout Thoreau's writings, a dirge-like counterpoint to nature's careless bounty.

Concord was one of the first inland towns to be settled in America, and so was one of the first to experience such a history of abandonment, rural hints of the romantic and gloom-ridden past that American visitors to Europe often relished. This was the civilized landscape to which Inness staked his claim. As Dutton points out, environmental psychologists have detected across human cultures "a preference for an element of mystery [in the landscape], which they define as a feeling that 'one could acquire new information if one were to travel deeper into the scene'—following the path or looking around the bend. They [experimental psychologists] speculate that a sense of mystery implies a 'longer-range, future aspect' of landscape preference. More than any other component of landscape characteristics, mystery stirs the human imagination and as such is vitally important to landscape as an art form."[111] Dutton goes on to write that landscapes that attract us are those that offer prospect and refuge, a prospect from which the landscape can be surveyed, and a refuge from which the traveler can see without being seen. In his rambles around Concord, Thoreau was expert at staying out of sight, walking distant property lines or lingering in the shadows of woodlots: seeing but rarely being seen, as he moved from copse to copse, often searching for arrowheads along faint paths blazed by Indians. In the fate of others, he contemplated his own—and ours.

For Thoreau's readers in the 1880s and 1890s, the defunct homesteads and old roads, "where the walls and fences are not cared for," would evoke mystery for other reasons, too: they were reminders of the dead who never returned from the war, of families that died off with no male heirs to make a go of the old homestead, of a past that had died in the cornfield at Antietam. For the Tonalist artists of the postwar generation, these places, often framed in the poetic cadences of Thoreau's writings, became the very stuff of their art: the ether of memory—what Lincoln had called the mystic chords of memory—which embraced this lost world, and encompassed the elusive subject matter of their art.

Dwight Tryon, who fished the coastal waters of Buzzards Bay as Thoreau plumbed the ponds of Concord, wrote in a letter to friend: "As you say, one may travel long and never find the same or as fine a country as New England. And this is right; to the properly balanced mind the charm of one's native soil speaks a deeper language than any other. I doubt if by any but the landscape painter can this be quite understood, the effect of the subtle under-charm, the faint reminiscences of childhood days, the memories of many a day afield, and who shall not say that even pre-natal memories come in the form of intuitions too subtle to define and, often unconsciously transferred to the picture, are the saving note of all."[112] In his apprehension of "prenatal" memories, Tryon came as close as any in his generation to identifying what might be seen as the primitive sources of our "needs of the soul." Robert Swain Gifford, who painted *Coast of Massachusetts*, circa 1900 (fig. 7.27), and a friend of Tryon who first introduced him to Buzzards Bay, also captured this idea and wrote of one of his sojourns: "[I]t is so refreshing to get away from the city now and inhale the sweet odors of the country. As I walked alone yesterday morning in the warn sunlight I was filled with quiet peaceful happiness, every old moss grown rock and the wood colored fences seemed like dear old friends, every year new impressions are received from the fresh opening spring. It seems to me that we get a better insight of our future life from the lessons birds,

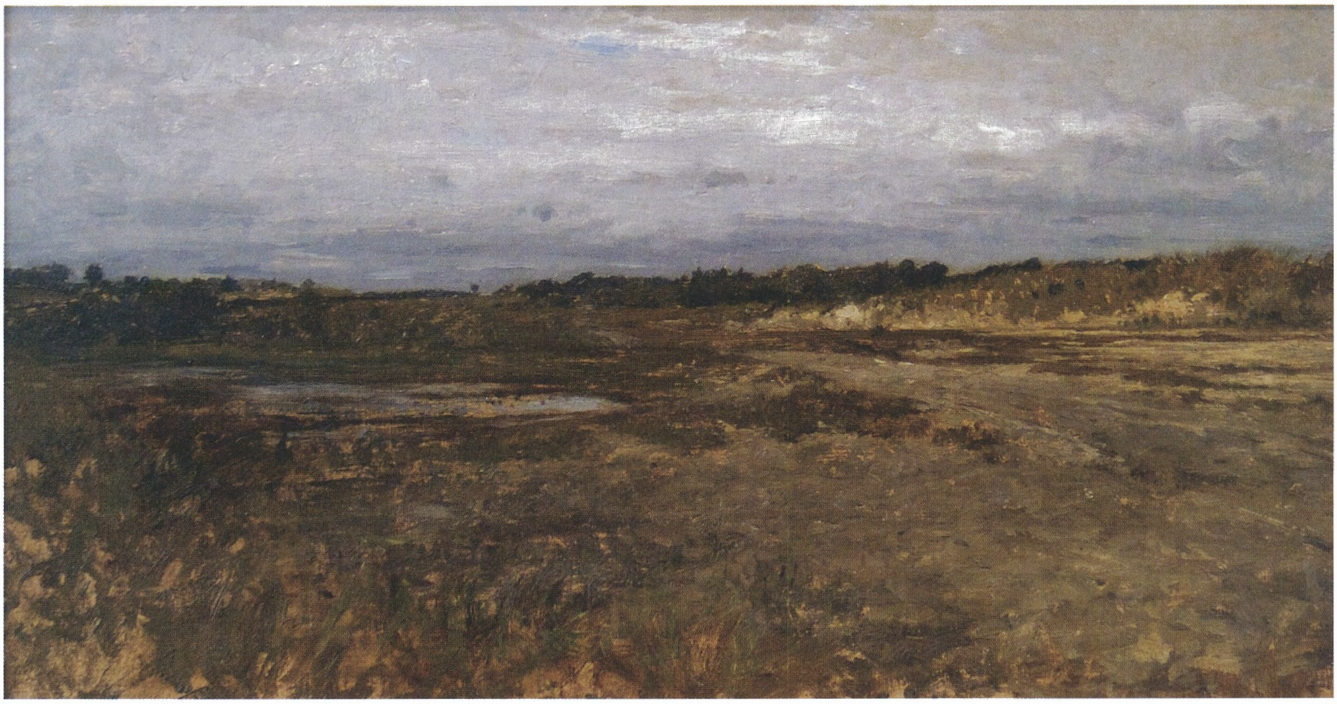


Fig. 7.27. Robert Swain Gifford, *Coast of Massachusetts*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 14 x 26 in. Courtesy Brock & Co.

flowers etc. teach us than from any other source if we will observe closely, with love."[113]

Thoreau's abiding sense of solitude evoked by the old roads provided only the starting point for his journey. More and more, he felt the need to go out in all types of weather, seeking lighting conditions that revealed what broad daylight could not: the mysterious and unexplorable process of metamorphosis: he was captivated by the unseen presence that haunted his rambles on misty afternoons and moonlit nights. "I find it good to be out this still, dark, mizzling afternoon; my walk or voyage is more suggestive and profitable than in bright weather. The view is contracted by the misty rain, the water is perfectly smooth, and the stillness is favorable to reflection. I am more open to impressions, more sensitive (not calloused or indurated by sun and wind), as if in a chamber still. My thoughts are concentrated; I am all-compact. The solitude is real, too, for the weather keeps other men at home. This mist is like a roof and walls over and around, and I walk with a domestic feeling. The sound of a wagon going over an unseen bridge is louder than ever, and so of other sounds. I am compelled to look at near objects. All things have a soothing effect; the very clouds and mists brood over me. My power of observation and contemplation is much increased. My attention does not wander. The world and my life are simplified."[114] Alexander Wyant's *Wayside Pool*, circa 1890s (see fig. 2.36), exemplifies the way dimming light actually tends to highlight landscape forms, emphasizing the larger masses and articulating the overall armature of the earth that broad daylight often obscures.

Such moments of vital transparency and compacted sensibility inflamed Thoreau's desire to get "nearer to the origins of things," as he wrote in his journal in 1851. Simplification—the concentration of focus and energy—was in many respects the raison d'être of Tonalism, the broad synthetic and kinetic arc of its creative articulation. In this, Thoreau provided a model and a means, and perhaps even more important, a kind of emotional energy that compelled artists and readers alike to grapple with the spirituality of everyday life—the data of emotions and perception as it played through mind and memory, and merged in dream. The vibration and refraction of soft-edged tonal forms stirred Thoreau on damp and misty days. "There is something creative & primal in the cool mist—this dewy mist does not fail to suggest music to me—unaccountably—fertility the origin of things—An atmosphere which has forgotten the sun—where the ancient principle of moisture prevails."[115] As Thoreau's life drew to its premature close, he pressed on, searching for the elusive answers to questions that arose at his every step, going out again and again into the night to walk his accustomed moonlit paths. Like the Tonalist artists of a generation later, who responded to Darwinian uncertainties by couching their art in dusk and moonlight, so in the 1850s a nocturnal brooding and eerie suggestiveness began to enter into Thoreau's journals.

Thoreau's Symbolic Visions: Nocturnes and the Pagan Spirit

The spiritual journey Emerson began found hints of resolution in Thoreau's glimpses of a preternatural landscape in his late journal entries. Thoreau's synthesis, if not exactly a God-in-nature pantheism, approached a kind of awed reverence for the subjective proximity of mind and nature, bound as one in the creative valence of man's love for the creation. This

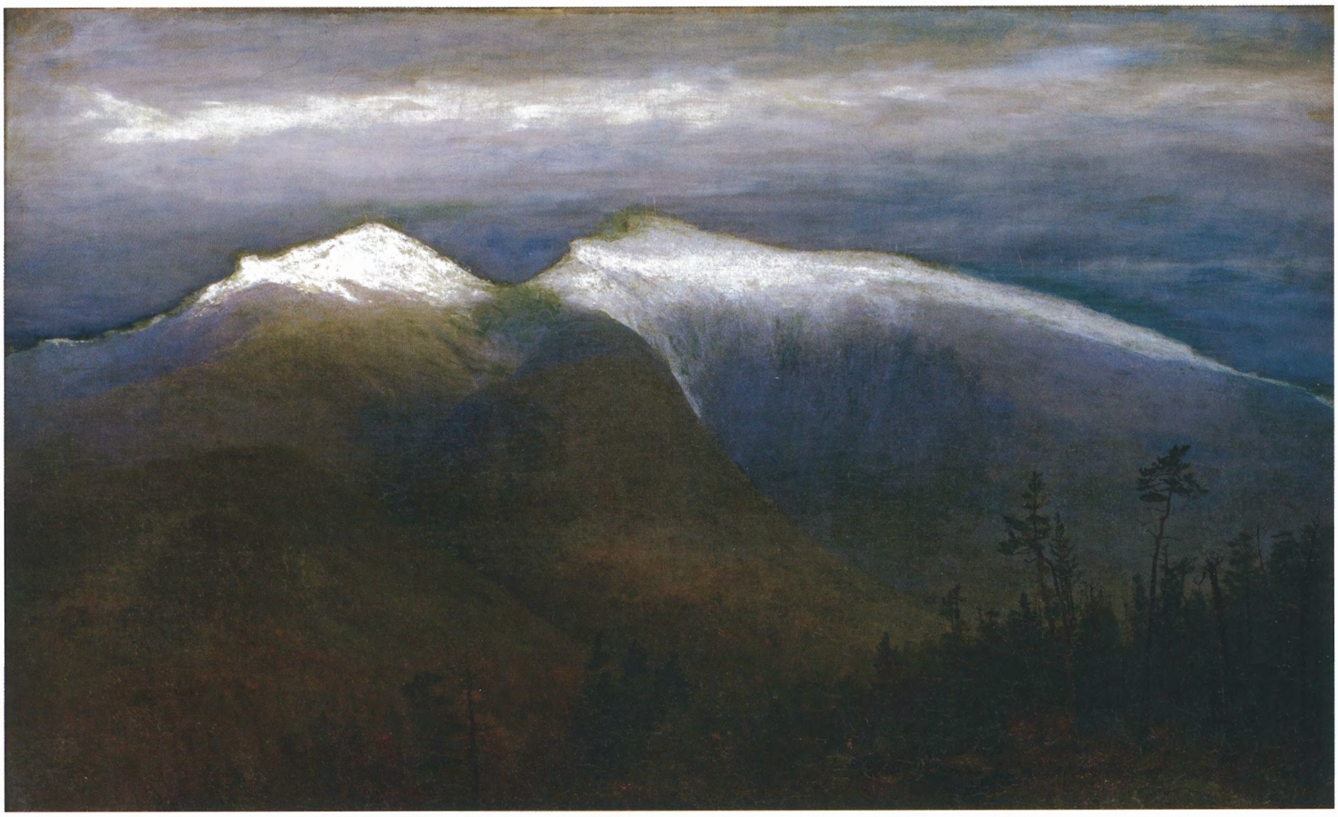
Stoic reverence for an all-encompassing energy at the heart of nature is reflected in what Frank Jewett Mather wrote of Homer Dodge Martin: "From beginning to end of Homer Martin's painting we have much the same kind of transaction between a sensitive clairvoyant spirit and natural appearances. What he seeks in nature is solace, suspension of the will, expansion of the contemplative."[116] Thoreau biographer Robert Richardson described Thoreau's developing insights: "His own observations, he kept reminding himself, had to be subjective as well as objective. In his best observations, now as always, one can both *see* the thing described and *feel* its effect on Thoreau."[117] Thoreau's late journals increasingly fill with responses that move beyond the romantic harmonies glimpsed through mist and rain to the profounder mysteries of twilight, and moonlight, out of which develops a personal symbolism—less about angles of vision and more about how the mysterious envelope of dusk's fading light transforms the ordinary into the supranatural. Thoreau adopts the vantage point of a Stoic visionary. Nature's forms become amorphous, shape-shifting, mobile: nature's protean reality is revealed, not in the detail and line of stark daylight, but in ambiguous and soft-edged forms as veil after veil of light is removed. For Thoreau, the experience is pure rapture. As Mather wrote in a description of Homer Dodge Martin: "It is somewhat stoical, valuing Nature, chiefly as a means for regaining in tranquility the form of one's own spirit."[118]

Such a Stoic stance, at once immersed in nature but aloof, finds counterparts in Hesiod and Virgil, Zeno and Seneca, Epictetus and Ovid, and certainly Marcus Aurelius; it is fundamentally a pagan valuing of nature as vital force or energy, and nature *as* landscape. It is also a way of life that respects man's place in the scheme of things and allows him freedom of will within his allocated sphere. Thoreau embraced such an accord with nature, as did his followers in the decades after his death, because it offered a path of virtue and insights that transcended the moment and ultimately death, which a Darwinian vision of metamorphosis only confirmed. It was a path of enlightenment and solace that Marcus Aurelius had spelled out in his *Meditations*: "Every part of mine then, will by mutation be disposed into a certain part of the world, and that in time into another part of the whole world, and that in time into another part; and so in infinitum; by which kind of mutation, I also became what I am, and so did they that begot me, and they before them, and so upwards in infinitum."[119] This rising spiritual crescendo of metamorphosis fit perfectly with the social Darwinism of Spencer and his American apostle, John Fiske. For writers and artists who felt themselves embodied in their work, Thoreau's version of Stoicism offered solace in the form of hope that their art would enter into the enduring stream of human creation. As the Greco-Roman elite almost universally adopted Stoicism in the centuries before the emergence of Christianity, so America's cultural elite in the decades before the turn of the nineteenth century found the stoic resilience of the New England mind a congenial and supportive taskmaster.

This renewed respect and affinity for the classical authors was on the rise in ante-bellum Boston and Concord. New Englanders began shedding the harsh—if not antagonistic and often leery—Calvinistic attitude toward nature and things natural as the source of sin and man's fall from grace, with a new and refreshingly unburdened spiritual freedom. With the end of the Civil War, such embodiments of the New England mind were less an emancipation from dead dogma and more a dusk-lit path offering escape from trauma and uncertainty.

Such was the experience of the art and literary critic William Crary Brownell, (1851–1928), a close friend and supporter of Homer Dodge Martin. Born in Westport, Massachusetts, and educated at Amherst College, Brownell, like William Dean Howells and many other New Englanders, moved to New York after the Civil War, becoming an art critic for the *Nation* and eventually the art and literary adviser to the publisher Charles Scribner's Sons for almost thirty years. As early as 1879, in the pages of *Scribner's Magazine*, Brownell would interpret the art of Whistler in terms few critics would use today: "His manner and method are not common-place; his artistic spirit is not unlike the true pagan spirit—not unlike the spirit of antique art before the Middle Age extinguished it, and of early modern art, after the monks had done with it; and his ideal is an ideal which includes both poetry and picturesqueness... Mr. Whistler's paganism does indeed seem pure and perfect. And that Pan is not dead cannot be too often insisted upon, even in painting, for it is profoundly true. Only, the wild goat's hoof-prints are not actually his footsteps, and the more one insists that they are, the more will the hearts of the believers in the death of Pan be hardened."[120] This anti-Puritan stance of Brownell, who noted the poet Swinburne's condemnation of the puritanical "destruction of the altars of Bacchus and the images of Aphrodite," so, quoting Swinburne, "we have fed on the fullness of death,"[121] is just another example of the post-Civil War cynicism that fostered the emergence of neo-pagan thinking in America.

Something of this spirit can be detected in Homer Dodge Martin's letters to his friend and patron William Crary Brownell, a combination of the high-flown and the earthy, arch, and ironic. Wrote Martin to Brownell from Lake Oswego in 1874, "People do what they want most to do and there is no virtue in sticking to a line if it be the only line in reach, but there is a heap of comfort in finding some intelligent fellow who will tell you that the line you are hanging on to is the perfect kind of line and the only one worthy of respect. I suppose the bottom of it is caring for a thing, whatever it may be. The unknowable force, outside of man, which seems to be the charm of the more serious aspects of landscape, manifests itself to a great degree



Fig, 7.28. Homer Dodge Martin, *White Mountains, From Randolph Hill*, c. 1880s. Oil on canvas, 30 x 50 in. Collection of Dr. John E. and Colles B. Larkin.

around this lake and I hope it may be the fortune of…you and us…"[122] At the dawn of Martin's transition from his Hudson River School style to a more expressive Tonalist mode (see his *White Mountains, From Randolph Hill*, circa 1880s, fig. 7.28), no doubt under the influence of La Farge (his studio mate) and Brownell, Martin, in a single sentence, both expresses his new allegiance to depicting the "unknowable force, outside of man" and crows over the commercial prospects that such an allegiance will bring to his backers. Martin was fully aware that his radical Tonalist style would, if anything, make sales even harder. Writing to Brownell from Concord in 1878 where he had been assigned to do some illustrations for *Scribner's* of Emerson's haunts—a thing he detested—Martin wrote to Brownell, "You must arrange to come to Boston and we will have a day or two of such comforts as is suitable for people of our high order of intellect, if we can't get that let's take almost anything. I am sending a note to LaFarge and shall hope to see him—Why should we not gather at the river together and howl out our aspirations in concert like the gregarious angels that we are?"[123] Such thoughts express a kind of pagan high jinx, conflating man the gregarious animal and the purely spiritual affinities of angels, or nods to Emersonian idealism couched in biting sarcasm about the commercial necessity that had forced Martin to accept a job as illustrator in the first place. Martin's private communications offer a glimpse of the kind of fraternal repartee for which he was famed at the Century Club, where he, Brownell, La Farge, Gilder, de Kay and a who's who of the nation's cultural elite were members.

Another Century Club member and Martin biographer, the art historian Frank Jewett Mather, characterized Martin's mind as keenly lyrical and meditative. Here was a man who could recite at will Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn." "What he seeks in nature is solace, suspension of the will, expansion of the contemplative self. The mood I have in passing called Virgilian. It might be well to add—of a Virgil exiled in an untamed land. The feeling is essentially pagan, and not to be confused with the Wordsworthian and mystical temper which it superficially recalls, nor with the sentimental primitivism of the Rousseauists. It is somewhat stoical, valuing Nature, chiefly as a means for regaining in tranquility the form of one's own spirit…It seems to me that his temper is quite classically poised and his real concern with the governance of his own soul."[124] In this, Mather, like fellow critics Brownell and de Kay, was attempting to anchor the American birthright and its distinctive genius in soil of ancient lineage.

The naturalist John Burroughs, writing in *The Century Magazine* about Thoreau's growing reputation in 1882, noted a similarly wry heathen brusqueness that had helped the poet's fame flourish since his death in 1862. "It was little more than in the bud at that time, and its full leaf and flowering are not yet, perhaps not in many years yet. He improves with age; in fact, requires age to take off a little of his asperity and fully ripen him.

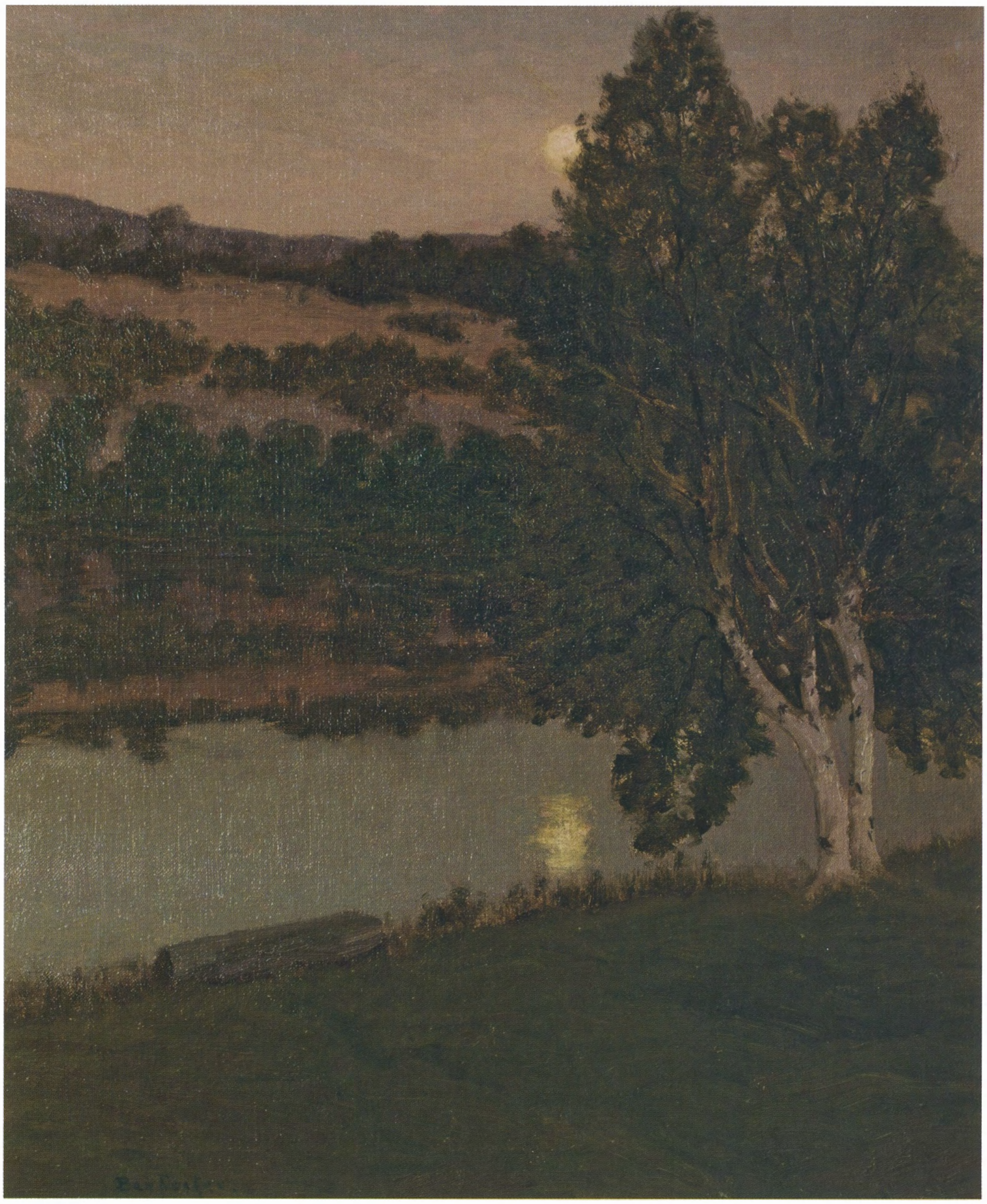


Fig. 7.28.1. Ben Foster, *Moonlight Birches,* c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 21½ x 17½ in. Private collection.

The generation he lectured so sharply will not give the same heed to his words as will the next and the next. The first effect of the reading of his books, upon many minds, is irritation and disapproval; the perception of their beauty and wisdom comes later. He makes short work of our prejudices; he likes the wind in his teeth, and to put it in the teeth of his reader…The world likes a good hater and refuser almost as well as it likes a good lover and acceptor, only it likes him further off."[125] Here, on the cusp of Thoreau's expanding fame, when only two of his books were known to the public, and his journals were yet to be published, or his articles republished, Burroughs touches on the change that had taken place in attitudes after the Civil War. In Thoreau's day, his anti-commercial, anti-establishment stance gained him few friends; after the war, his somewhat dyspeptic, scrappy, and deeply principled attitude, and his genuine devotion to sound ideals, "fills his own niche well," in Burroughs's words.[126] His pagan, non-conformist spirit had become mainstream.

In Thoreau's late journal writings, as his health began to falter, more and more natural metaphors creep into his observations, as does something of the fading light that characterized his stoical acceptance of death. Writing of the shadows of elms and their rich traceries, he notes: "At night they lie along the earth. They tower, they arch, they droop over the streets like chandeliers of darkness…The air is remarkably still and unobjectionable on the hilltop, and the whole world below is covered as with a gossamer blanket of moonlight. It is just about as yellow as a blanket. It is a great dimly burnished shield with darker blotches on its surface. You have lost some light, it is true, but you have got this simple and magnificent stillness, brooding like genius." For Thoreau, moonlight, increasingly became suggestive of dreams and the imagination. "Moonlight like day-light is more valuable for what it suggests than for what it actually is. It is a long past season of which I dream."[127] As Thoreau dug into experience, eliciting transformative metaphors, his very language of experience began to approximate the process of metamorphosis itself: seeing elided into feeling to coalesce as one, as if some invisible wave energy began to encompass the observer and the observed. In the same way the Tonalist artist would later respond with brush in hand to the feeling of the image in the mind's eye, so Thoreau the poet conjoined subject and object in a transformative metaphor. Ben Foster, who was equally fond of wandering the hills of his Cornwall Hollow home, seemed enamored, too, of the suggestiveness of moonlight in his painting *Moonlit Road*, circa 1900 (see fig. 5.125).

In these moments of rapture, Thoreau wrote of feeling as if he were in the presence of "superior powers," or under the spell of unseen forces, which the visible world emanated, and which the body absorbed in feelings of expansion and elevation. These feelings echoed Marcus Aurelius: "Everything is right for me, which is right for you—O Universe. Nothing for me is too early or too late, which comes in due time from you. Everything is fruit to me which your seasons bring, O Nature. From you are all things, in you are all things, to you all things return."[128] One detects in Thoreau an undertone of frustration in communicating such visual out-of-body experiences, as if the art of expression—even his grandest metaphors—failed to properly convey his impressions, as if some technical resource of language still eluded him or had yet to come into existence.

As Thoreau grew older, he increasingly inclined to autumnal moods, preferring the evening hours to the morning, and the moonlight walks that further focused the senses on the bare essentials, which in turn provided the grist for his evolving personal symbolism. He found the nights "medicative and fertilizing... By moonlight all is simple. We are enabled to erect ourselves, our minds, on account of the fewness of objects. We are no longer distracted. It is simple as bread and water. It is simple as the rudiments of an art—a lesson to be taken before sunlight, perchance, to prepare us for that."[129]

Almost a half-century later, William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, could look back on Thoreau and place him in the long line of stoics and mystics who, by reconnecting with nature, were thus able to sustain reciprocating and dynamic relationships with the powers therein. "The outward face of nature need not alter, but the expression of meaning in it alter. It was dead and is alive again. It is like the difference of looking upon a person without love, or upon the same person with love... It is as if all doors were opened, and all paths freshly smoothed... Such a spirit was that of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. It is that of mind-curers, of the transcendentalists, and of the so-called 'liberal' Christians."[130] James, trained as an artist by William Morris Hunt, had fully internalized the ideas and the very cadences of Emerson and Thoreau, which were directed at his disillusioned postwar generation, the same generation of Tonalists who had extracted from nature—a nature gazed on with love—an expressive power that would revolutionize art and make it alive as never before.

Moonlight had long been an essential ingredient of the Romantic movement, from Byron and Shelley to Longfellow, who wrote exuberantly of lunar effects. Chopin's nocturnes, in musical terms, prefigured Whistler's Nocturnes of the 1870s. And, as Robert Richardson has pointed out, Thoreau's prose nocturnes in the 1850s attempt to express the language of night: "Thoreau also thought, in this pre-Jungian era, that night could symbolize the unconscious. By mastering the language of night he hoped, he said, to conquer some realms from the night."[131] Night's meditative spirit, as Thoreau knew only too well, posed as many questions as answers. "I turn and see the silent, contemplative, spiritual moon shedding the softest imaginable light on the western slopes, as if, after a thousand years of polishing, their surfaces were just beginning to be bright; a pale whitish luster. Already the crickets chirp to the moon a different strain, and the night winds blows, rustling the leaves, from where? What gave it birth?"[132]

As the maturing Thoreau found himself drawn to nocturnal musings, so the Tonalists became increasingly preoccupied with twilit and moonlit images as the nineteenth century waned and the new century presented its own brand of uncertainty, in turn generating new modernist impulses to explore the human psyche. Already in the late 1880s, Dwight Tryon had painted the moonlit landscape of his new home in South Dartmouth (see *Moonlight in November*, c. 1887, fig. 5.91). The 1880s had also seen the florescence of Blakelock and Ryder's moonlight imagery, which by the first decade of the new century would already be regarded as classics of American painting—a primal American sympathy in many minds, reflecting what modernist artists and critics considered the romantic and visionary bedrock of the American experience. Blakelock's moonlights began selling for thousands of dollars as frenzied collectors sought to possess a signature example of the "mad" genius's most famous motif. In 1909 the modernist critic Charles H. Caffin, writing about the late works of Dwight Tryon, discerned a radical breakthrough in American landscape painting, moving beyond aesthetics and personal sentiment to the translation of tangible facts into natural symbols "of the invisible, impalpable facts of the Eternal and Universal [.] What, if this conception of the symbolism of matter be so strong in him [the artist], that it colors his attitude toward nature, so that in the concrete he is conscious of the abstract? For lack of a better word we may

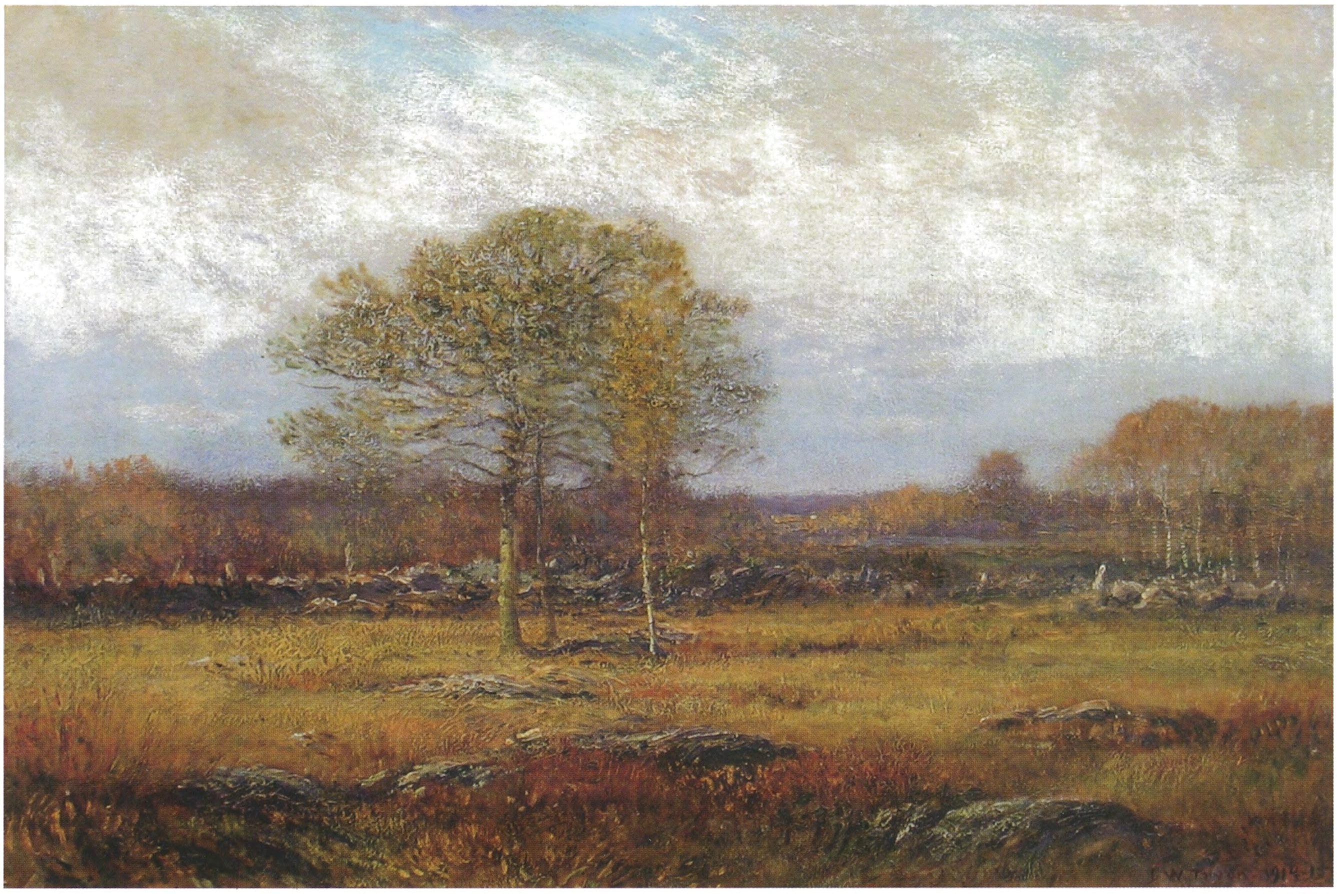


Fig. 7.29. Dwight Tryon, *Autumn Fields*, 1914–15. Oil on panel, 16 x 24 in. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

call it the spiritual attitude toward life and nature."[133] Caffin, as Thoreau had a half-century before, identified this emerging spiritual stance as a universal, "held alike by savage and by cultivated people; by our own aboriginal Indian, as by the Buddhist of the East; represented in Hellenic Pantheism, as in the Christian tenet of a god made manifest in the flesh … It is, in a word, the expressed consciousness of some Force outside of and greater than anything we know, of which what we know is but the symbol."[134] Tryon was a devoted acolyte of Thoreau, owning a nine-volume set of his writings and quoting and paraphrasing the poet throughout his life. Like Thoreau, Tryon roamed the fields during his eight-months-a-year sojourns in South Dartmouth, pausing at tumbled stone walls to survey an overgrown pasture for the granite outcroppings that whispered their presence, or to the windblown tree lines of spring and fall that hinted at the changing seasons, yet endured, and would endure in his art (*Autumn Fields*, 1914–15, fig. 7.29).

In the decades around 1900, perhaps no artist penetrated to the core of Thoreau's symbolic world more deeply than Charles Warren Eaton. As Ben Foster portrayed the metamorphic flux of the hills and valleys of his Cornwall Hollow home, his expressive paint handling mimicking the fluctuating felt life of nature; as Tryon translated the visible facts of nature into universal symbols, so Eaton sought to decipher the rich layers of symbolic meaning contained in the groves of white pine that grew around his summer home in Thompson, Connecticut. Eaton's use of the watercolor medium to explore the opalescent effects of moonlight—as in *The Haystack*, c. 1900, fig. 7.30; and *Moonlight Thompson*, 1896, fig. 7.31—was unmatched by his contemporaries. The watercolor medium allowed him to portray moonlight and its texture in a dazzling array of variations: as a nacreous screen of atmosphere, as a radiant source of nocturnal energy, and as a symbolizing agent, highlighting and silhouetting natural form to elicit pattern formations that manifest the unseen armature of nature. Eaton's mastery of the medium was sealed by his ruthless simplification and focus, and by his exploitation of the inherent character of watercolor, which allows for a complete merging of the artist's gesture with the paper itself—soaking, tincturing, floating, and blotting pigments in soft-edged brush marks and hazy forms, which approximate the physical fluidity of moisture and fog, mist and atmosphere, while portraying the emotional tenor of a heightened spiritual state of awareness, akin to dreams and mystical rapture. Eaton's moonlit watercolors approach a seamless pictorial rendering of human consciousness in which the dream and dreamer merge as one. A technical virtuosity

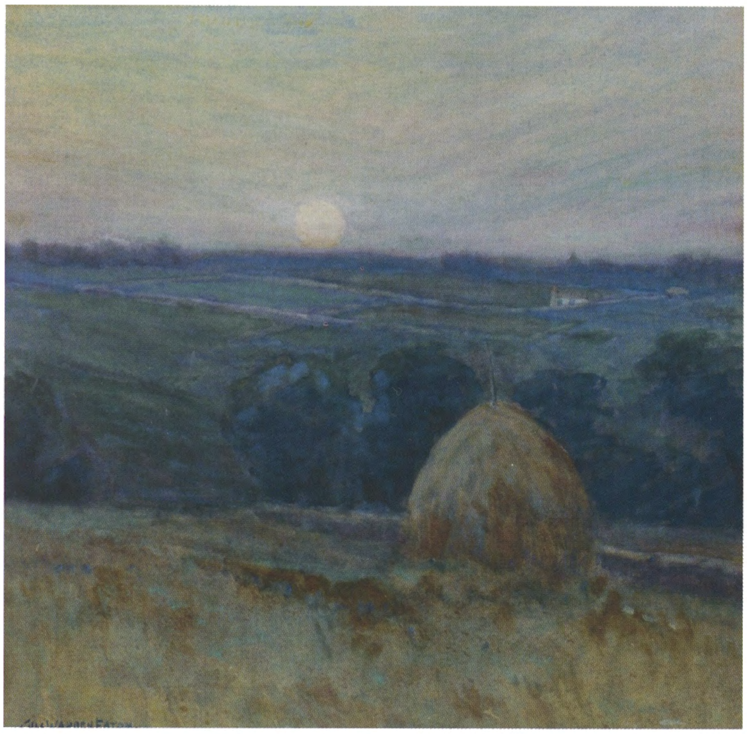


Fig. 7.30. Charles Warren Eaton, *The Haystack*, c. 1900. Watercolor, 15 x 15 in. Private collection.

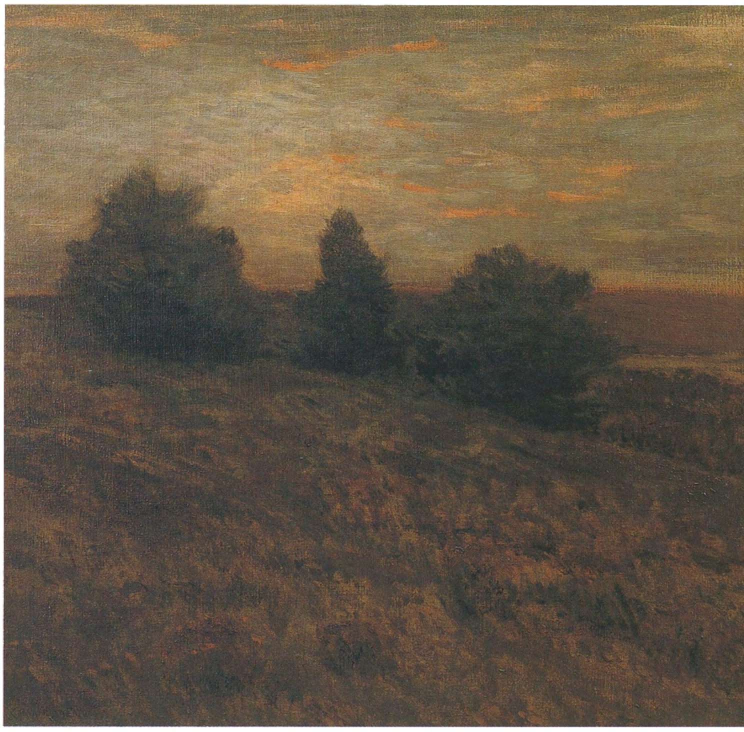


Fig. 7.32. Charles Warren Eaton, *Autumnal*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 28 x 30 in. Private collection.

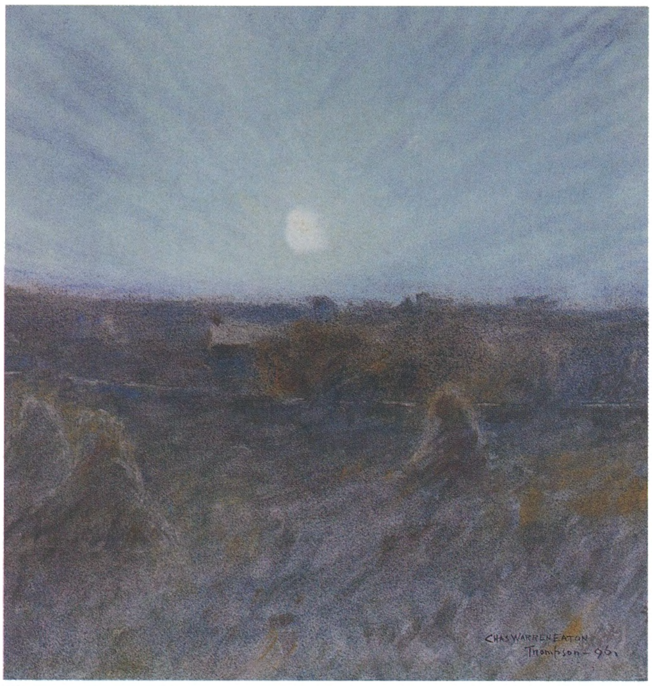


Fig. 7.31. Charles Warren Eaton, *Moonlight Thompson*, 1896. Watercolor, 9 x 9 in. Private collection.

in the medium, à la Whistler, he also incorporated into his oils after 1900, allowing his thinned pigments to soak into the canvas weave to create a near-perfect confluence of means and ends (for example, in *Autumnal*, c. 1910, fig. 7.32).

Thoreau and Charles Warren Eaton: The Silent Realm of the White Pine and the Transformative Memory

The regal white pine held a special place in Thoreau's heart and some of his most profound insights were prompted by its sighting—the pine's luxuriant windswept boughs, singly or in groves, caught in silhouetted splendor against the gloaming or in sibilant moonlight. Charles Warren Eaton's white pine paintings after 1900 offer an uncanny visual metaphor for Thoreau's quest to merge the spiritual and material dimensions, to discover a symbolic valence, of import both private and universal, aesthetic and nostalgic, in nature's muted counterpoint. As early as 1900, Eaton had gone as far as Maine to paint a line of white pines against a twilit horizon (see *Maine Pines*, c. 1900, fig. 5.107), employing dynamic facture, soft-edged symbolic form, and diaphanous tones of spellbinding intensity. At age forty-three, Eaton, like Thoreau in the mid- to late 1850s, was at the height of his powers; the artist had spent twenty years probing his subjects and developing the necessary technical skills to grapple with their essence. By constantly moving in the direction of simplification and concentration of imagery, Eaton finally settled on the white pine as his signature motif. Aesthetic Tonalism, with its intimate feel for balance and poised abstraction, gave way to Eaton's broader and more expressive paint handling in the late 1890s, in which the white pine was more a revelation of inner emotion than a mere representation of nature. Between 1900 and 1910, Eaton would paint an extraordinary series of twilights and nocturnes of pines at his summer retreat in Thompson. Thoreau's thoughts from the 1850s foreshadow Eaton's obsession with the white pine fifty years later. "I see a white pine dimly in the horizon... its upright stem and straight horizontal feathered branches, while at the same time I hear a robin sing. Each enhances the other. That tree seems the emblem of my life; it stands for the west, the wild. The sight of it is grateful to me as to a bird whose perch it is to be at the end of a weary flight. I am not sure whether the music I hear is most in the robin's song or in its boughs. My wealth should be all in pine-tree shillings."[135]

By 1900, full-grown white pines along the East Coast were still a relatively rare sight. As had been the case in Thoreau's Concord and Ben Foster's Cornwall Hollow, where the original stands of white pine had long been cut, so with Eaton's Thompson: forests of white pine had been so thoroughly lumbered out throughout New England that old stands of the trees were relatively few and far between, and thus greatly valued by lumbermen, artist and poet alike.[136] Like Eaton, Thomas Dewing, Arthur Hoeber, and Foster found them compelling subjects. Thoreau saw the old pines as the last grand remnant of the early forests (and the lost world of the Indians); when they were cut he mourned their passing. He noted in his journal that he was rarely out of earshot of the sound of an ax. In the 1850s, lumbering in coastal Massachusetts had become so extensive that firewood for Boston had to be shipped in from Maine. Only when coal became an alternative fuel source did pressure on the remaining wood lots and forests begin to diminish. As New England farms were abandoned for better land in the West, the white pine slowly repopulated large swaths of cleared farmland. Many of the landscapes Eaton painted, showing a lonely stand of white pine surrounded by overgrown pastures, are snapshots of a bygone age. Since then, these places have either returned to woods or been developed for suburban housing.

In Eaton's work pine groves are viewed close-up and at a distance, from below, above, and inside the sheltering boughs gazing out. The artist's paint application varies from canvas to canvas, as if demonstrating that varying moods of perception call for different expressive modes. One detects in Eaton's pine paintings a near-obsessive desire to delve into the heart of the moment, and in so doing, to indulge a visceral range of subjective responses. Eaton could paint quiet or loud, rough or soft, using pigments in bold, painterly impasto or so thinned that the paint is absorbed in the weave of the canvas—dematerializing means and ends, and creating surfaces approximating the feel of watercolor, or when using glazes, the translucence of antique Chinese porcelain. His expressive brushstroke, especially in the depiction of white pine boughs, has a pronounced gestural quality—the felt assuredness of practiced calligraphy in which the artist's hand, object, and mood are fused into a single response. The result was the mystical rapture, the merging of mind and spirit—"the fairer creation than we know," in Emerson's words—that Emerson and Thoreau sought.

In Eaton's *Golden Sunset,* circa 1900–10 (fig. 7.33), the immediacy of the foreground trees teetering on the distant horizon and immersed in a throbbing sky of yellow-gold produces a double vision, in which the real and transcendent intersect, and in which night and day, the near and far, become unified in an envelope of sensuous, all-encompassing light. Green patches of glazing articulate local color; they mysteriously flicker, hover, and coruscate. White pine boughs banner the sky as if reaching for the last fading embers of day. Eaton captures that haunting moment at dusk when earth tones pale as the spectrum of red light falters, yet still pulsate with reflected atmospheric light, when the viewer's depth perception begins to fail, causing landscape forms to vibrate with intensified green tones, even as they become indistinct. Hazy color elides into a monochromatic yet translucent density: trees, bushes, and the air itself assume an emboldened presence for the viewer. As the light levels decrease at twilight, the wavelengths of color to which the eye is most sensitive shifts, the red end of the spectrum darkening first, while the greens are enhanced, gaining a ghostly appearance that the oncoming solitary hush of night seems only to enhance. Eaton, like Thoreau, exploited an evolutionary adaptation—the heightened visual acuity of human eyesight at dusk—to re-create a transformed and transforming nature replete with lush greens and an infinite variety of organic shapes, which in turn register as symbolic forms in the mind's eye. Thoreau observed in his journals, "And the night winds whisper their questions: from whence came this creation, and where to, and 'what gave it birth?... I am sure my eye rested with pleasure on the white pines, now reflecting a silvery light, the infinite stories of their boughs, tier above tier, a sort of basaltic structure, a crumbling precipice of pine horizontally stratified. Each pine is like a great green feather stuck in the ground... On this my eyes pastured, while the squirrels were up the trees behind me."[137]

Another work by Eaton, *The Strip of Pines,* 1908 (fig. 7.34), features the same hillside in moonlight as depicted in *Golden Sunset.* The perspective has shifted back from the crest of the hill so that the pines become a silhouetted grove. The artist's brushstrokes are ragged and broken—a tactile simile of the bark they approximate, only to merge in near monochromatic silhouette under night's shadows. Such a broad, graphic, and fundamentally abstract rendering of natural forms not only produces an immediacy of emotion but also gives the picture heightened dramatic impact. *The Strip of Pines* has a pronounced stylistic affinity to paintings by Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) and the Belgian landscape artist Albijn Van den Abeele (1835–1918), which Eaton could have seen at the Paris

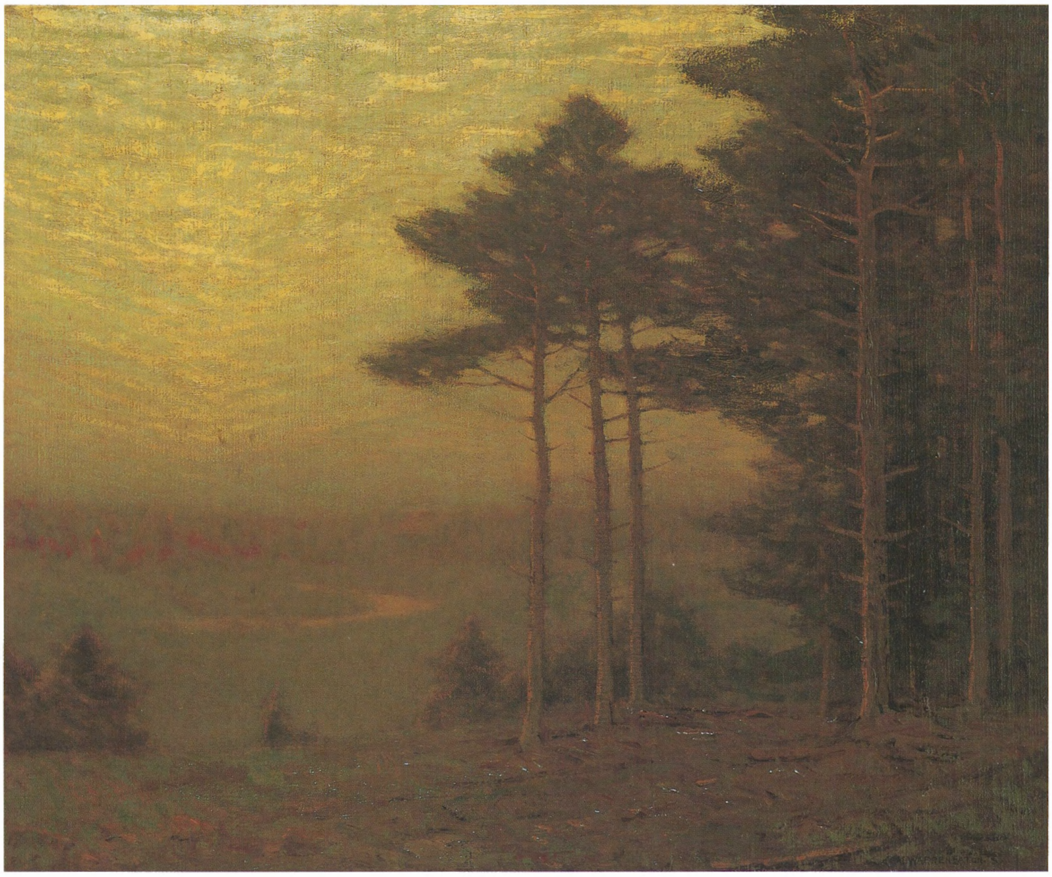


Fig. 7.33. Charles Warren Eaton, *Golden Sunset,* c. 1900–10. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. Private collection.

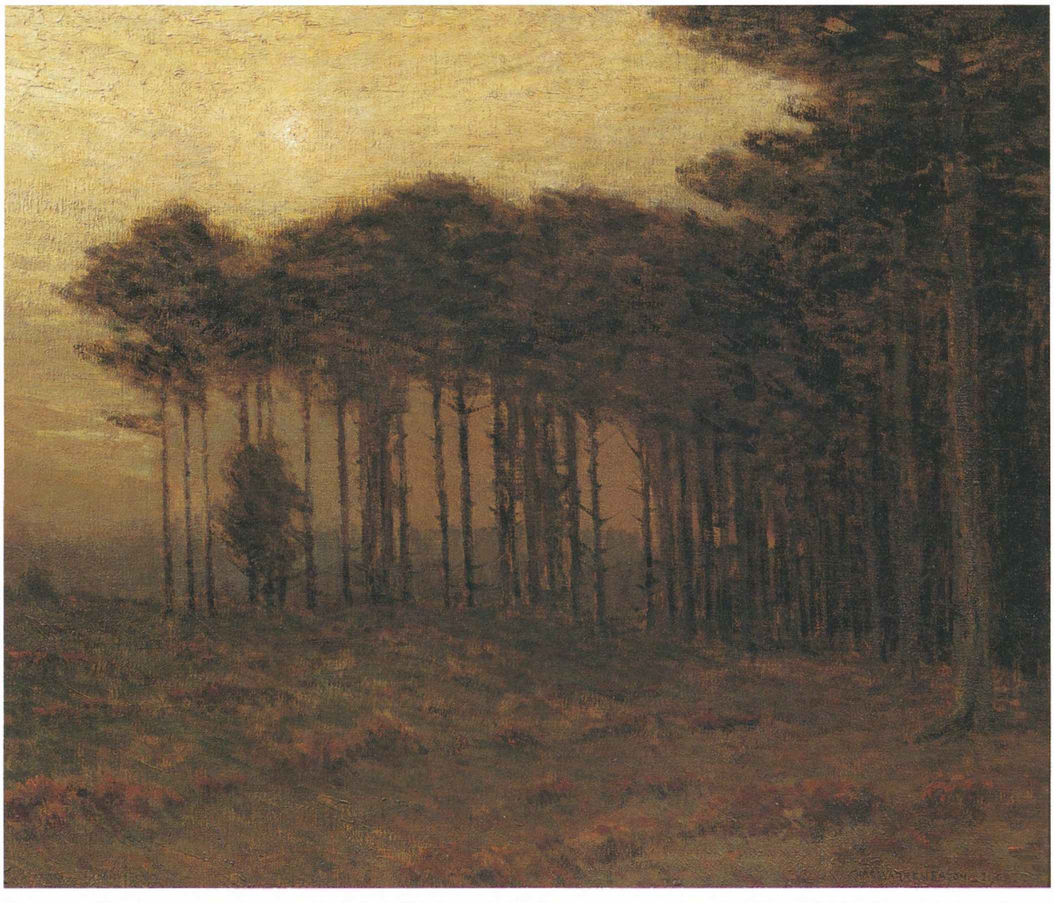


Fig. 7.34. Charles Warren Eaton, *The Strip of Pines*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. Montclair Art Museum.

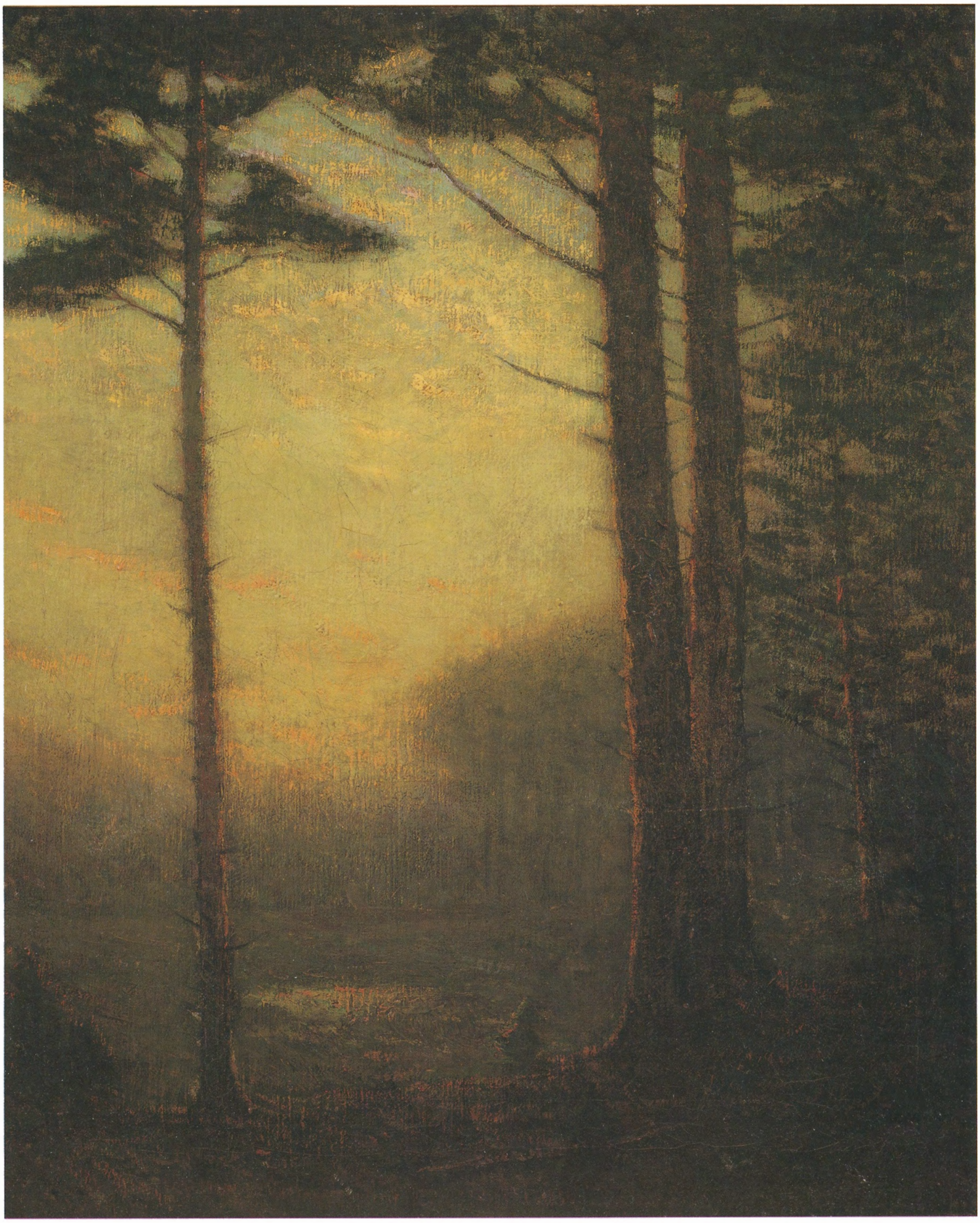


Fig. 7.35. Charles Warren Eaton, *Sunset Pines*, c. 1900–10. Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in. Private collection.

Exposition Universelle of 1900. Such Romantic and Symbolist landscapes were a leitmotif of fin-de-siècle painting, linking many national schools and artists from various traditions.

In *Sunset Pines*, circa 1900–10 (fig. 7.35), Eaton has transformed his trees into almost pure decorative abstraction. From inside the hilltop grove, the silhouetted trunks and branches form a flattened aperture into glittering space; the pines appear emblematic—an intoning of a supranatural metaphor that translates the organic world into symbols, or as Emerson wrote, a visual language: "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting the natural appearance as its picture."[138] Such natural symbols, the reinvigorated "forms" that Emerson called on his countrymen to embrace as the basis for a distinctive national identity, find their way into the landscape repertoire of many Tonalists. Their imaginations were stirred by bowed tree forms and gesturing branches, the rocks and boulders shouldering free from a hoary cloak of meadow grasses, the denuded hills and valleys adorned with tumbled stone walls, the mirrored faces of streambeds and ponds, the hazy sun and crystalline moon, drifting mist and fog—things of dream and memory. Such memory-embedded afterimages, possibly of primordial disposition, were the more unaccountable and mysterious because they defied logic, and because the evolutionary explanations for such instinctive responses remained yet unknown, as they had for Thoreau and Emerson, and before them Goethe and the Greeks.

Perhaps Marcel Proust, who wrote seven novels in his attempt to grasp the essence of memory, to analyze the mind's embedded attractions and associations—his "perfume" of memory contained in the smell and taste of his aunt's madeleine dipped in a decoction of lime flowers—came closest to understanding the innate responses of mind and memory to certain natural symbols. "All these memories, flowing one after another, were condensed into a single substance, but had not so far coalesced that I could not discern between the three strata, between my oldest, my instinctive memories, those others, inspired more recently by a taste or 'perfume,' and those which were actually the memories of another, from whom I had acquired them at second hand—no fissures indeed, no geological faults, but at least those veins, those streaks of colour which in certain rocks, in certain marbles, point to differences of origin, age, and formation."[139]

Proust's method of teasing out the enduring truth or reality of Emerson's underlying forms (Proust studied Emerson extensively and considered him a genius of poetic metaphor) was to embody memory in metaphor, simile, or association, transforming the natural images he had witnessed as a child walking his two countryside paths into the language of personal symbols, precisely as artists translated the world into pictorial symbols. Charles de Kay recognized and emphasized this idea in his criticism: the greatest art, enduring art, is a projection of individualized symbols (sentiment), not universalized symbols (sentimentality), which tend to lose power and fall away in time. Proust wrote of his memories of childhood experiences (the buried memories) along his two "ways," observing that they "give to those impressions a foundation, depth, a dimension lacking from the rest. They invest them, too, with a charm, a significance which is for me alone. When, on a summer evening, the resounding sky growls like a tawny lion, and every everyone is complaining of the storm, it is along the 'Méséglise way' that my fancy strays alone in ecstasy, inhaling, through the noise of falling rain, the odour of invisible and persistent lilac-trees."[140]

Proust and the Role of Alexander Harrison

> *It needs but a dismal autumn day when the sun sets unseen, a road drying after rain, as the coming of the earliest winter chills, to make us drunk on the remembered beauty of the past and the primal substance of our lives.*[141] —Marcel Proust

The connection of Proust with the Tonalist movement, far from being circumstantial, or simply a case of a writer influenced by a common zeitgeist, is both formative and essential to Proust's literary art. A central character in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the painter Elstir, was based on the American expatriate and Tonalist Alexander Harrison (see figs. 3.41–3.44). Although Elstir is generally considered in Proust scholarship to be a composite portrait of artists known to Proust, Whistler being the foremost influence, certainly the character and circumstances of Elstir when the narrator first meets the artist in the novel fits the identity of Harrison (fig. 7.36). In 1895, Proust and his friend Reynaldo Hahn, a Venezuelan-born composer, met Harrison in the Brittany coastal village of Beg-Meil, where Harrison had a summer studio. They were thrilled that the famous artist accepted their invitation to dinner. Proust biographer William Carter writes: "Hahn recalled having seen one of his works, *Blue Lake*, in Paris's Luxembourg Palace,

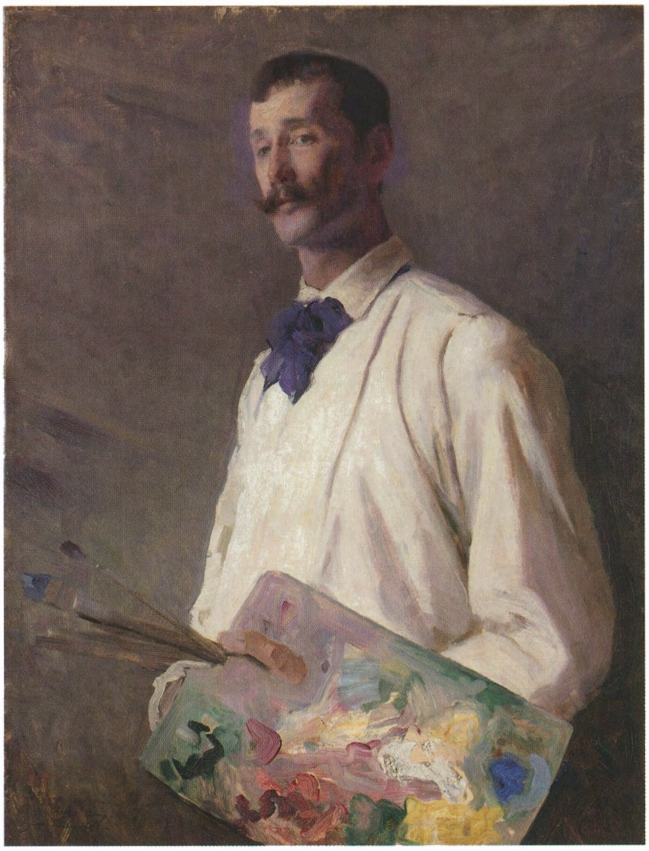


Fig. 7.36. Cecilia Beaux, *Alexander Harrison*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 26 x 19¾ in. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. Partial gift of Juliana Terian Gilbert in memory of Peter G. Terian and Museum Purchase, J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund for American Art.

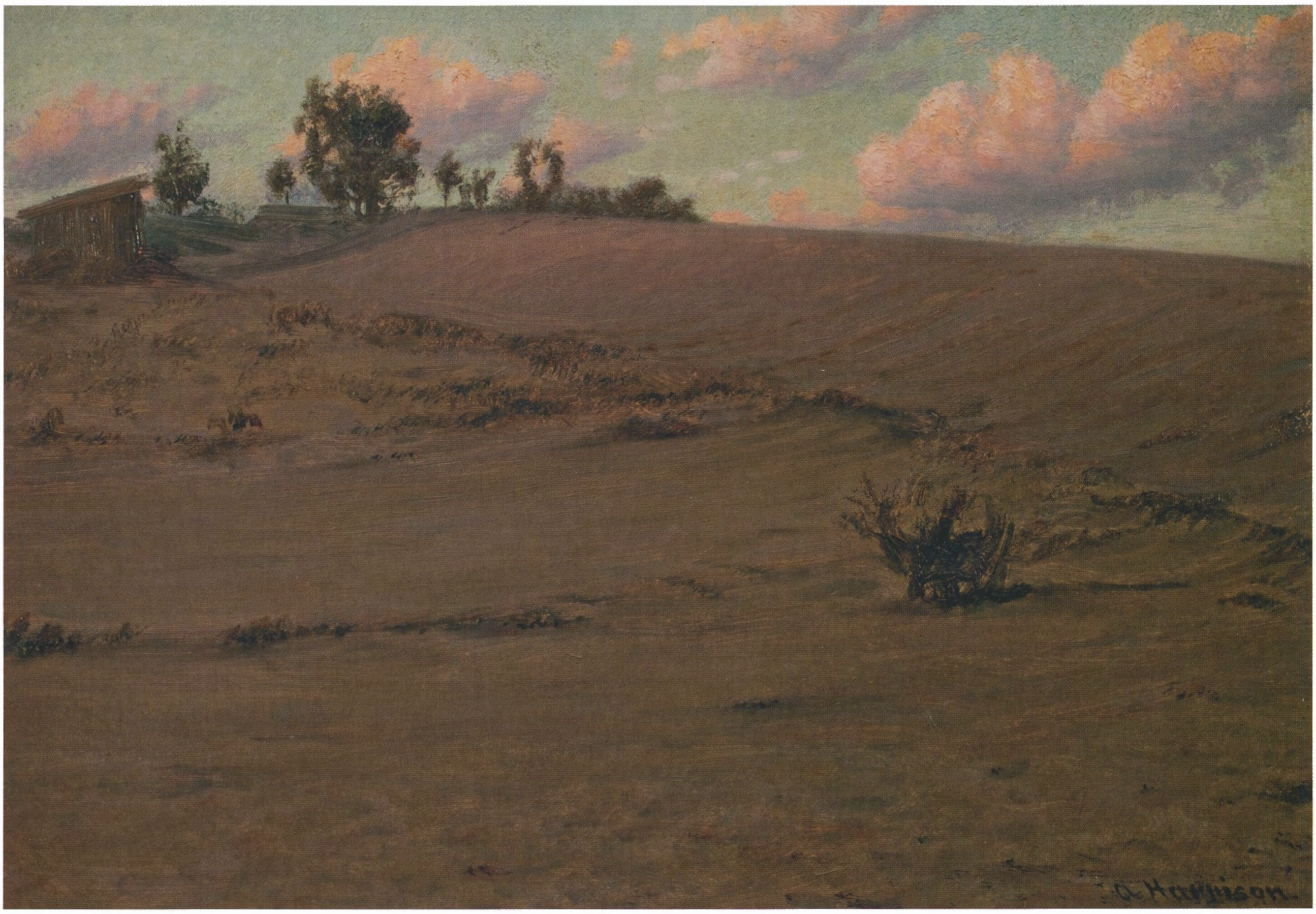


Fig. 7.37. Alexander Harrison, *Beach Shadows*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 17 x 24 in. Private collection.

which then served as an important art museum. Harrison rented a ramshackle studio constructed of unpainted planks on a nearby farm (fig. 7.37). Fanatical about the beauty of the sunsets at Beg-Meil, every evening he ran down to the dunes to watch the sun sink into the sea. Soon Proust and Hahn were joining him for the late afternoon race to catch the sunsets, whose brilliant, shifting colors Hahn described...: 'We have seen the sea successively turn blood red, purple, nacreous with silver, gold, white, emerald green, and yesterday we were dazzled by an entirely pink sea speckled with blue sails.' Harrison, with his painter's eye and native's knowledge of the area, advised them on using their [train] passes to see the most beautiful views and sunsets. Of all the places they visited along the coast, Proust 'infinitely' preferred 'Penmarch...a sort of mixture of Holland and the Indies and Florida (according to Harrison). Nothing could be more sublime than a tempest seen from there.' He liked Penmarch best, no doubt, because he saw it as metaphorical in nature, embodying not a single place but many. Proust always chose the complex over the simple, seeing many things in one, which led him to seek the harmony that unites them. The views of land and sea elements in such beautiful sites as Penmarch deepened his impressions and later inspired seascapes found in his novel and in Elstir's painting *The Port of Carquethuit*."[142]

Proust and Hahn would visit Harrison's Paris studio in 1897[143] and in 1908 Proust would write that Harrison had been a "stimulating guide."[144] Proust's youthful experiences of Beg-Meil and Harrison in 1895 served as wellsprings of youthful memory impressions, which first supercharged his sensitivity to landscape and later influenced the development of a more poetic prose style to accommodate his heightened response to landscapes that when apprehended through the veil of memory registered as visual epiphanies, replete with mysterious symbols and entrancing metaphors. Such spiritual epiphanies had been established in his first novel, *Swann's Way*, when the young narrator was transfixed by the sight of water lilies on the Vivonne, the smell of hawthorns in bloom, and the steeples of Martinville; these acted as recurring leitmotifs of memory and haunting indecipherable presences: "...suddenly a roof, a gleam of sunlight on stone, the smell of a path would make me stop still, to enjoy the special pleasure that each of them gave me, and also because they appeared to be concealing, beyond what my eyes could see, something which they invited me to come and take but which despite all my efforts I never managed to discover."[145]

It is in his second novel, *Within a Budding Grove*, that the narrator (Proust was 24 in 1895) first meets the artist Elstir (Harrison) in the fictional Rivebelle (Beg-Meil) near the coastal resort of Balbec (Cabourg). Over the long course of Proust's seven novels Elstir is the most developed and sympathetic of all Proust's artist characters, and he mentors the narrator in the art of "looking." Proust knew of Whistler's work as early as 1890 and in 1897 met Whistler for the first and only time, trying to reconcile the master with his nemesis John Ruskin, whom Proust greatly admired. Although Whistler figures in much of the composite character of Elstir, right down to the sound of the name that echoes the French pronunciation of Whistler, the essential temperament of Elstir and his visceral love for seascapes is clearly based on Harrison. Proust's narrator Marcel notes that the "great artist" Elstir had a long history in the area; he founded an artists' colony—Harrison was an early member of the American expatriate artist colony in nearby Concarneau—that had largely dispersed with the advent of tourism; Elstir painted nude models in the out-of-doors—for which Harrison was celebrated both in France and America; and Elstir was an artist of international celebrity, all accurate descriptions of Harrison in the mid-1890s.[146]

Crucially, it is Harrison's temperament—the spirit of his artistry—that fundamentally influenced how Proust translated seascapes and landscapes into poetic metaphors. "Elstir loved to give, to give himself. Everything that he possessed, ideas, works, and the rest which he counted for far less, he would have given gladly to anyone who understood him. But, for the lack of congenial company, he lived in an unsociable isolation which fashionable people called pose and ill breeding, the authorities a recalcitrant spirit, his neighbours madness, his family selfishness and pride. And no doubt at first he had thought with pleasure, even in his solitude, that, thanks to his work, he was addressing from a distance, was imbuing with a loftier idea of himself, those who had misunderstood or offended him. Perhaps, in those days, he lived alone not from indifference but from love of his fellows...."[147] Proust's early identification with Elstir's aesthetic stance is clear: how the artist's early renunciation of approval and his need for creative isolation is essential to the masterpieces that will eventually redound to the artist's fame and the love and respect of his friends. Such remained the galvanizing expectations of Proust for his life's work. Something of this defensive ascetic attitude was expressed by Harrison himself in a 1901 letter to the *Philadelphia Times*, explaining his expatriate life. "I have just come from New York, and although I painted while there, I was not absorbed by my work as I am in Paris. You cannot help being affected by your environment. Every man whom I met talked money. Even the artists were influenced by it, and painted things they did not care for, simply because they would sell. In art you must work for love, not for money. I know a painter in New York who has found that the public will buy a certain style of picture, so he simply reproduces that one subject. He is making a fortune and spoiling an artist. Most of the men who remain at home are forced to do this, more or less. New York is an expensive place to live in, and it requires great courage to be poor there. When it comes to a question of sacrificing your family or your art, art generally suffers, whereas in Paris it doesn't matter whether you are poor or rich."[148]

Such opinions, for which Harrison was severely criticized in New York, speak to his heartfelt devotion to his calling and explain Proust's admiration for the character of Elstir. In particular, Harrison's concentration on the metamorphic splendor of the sea, recalled in memory and transposed to canvas—what in turn became the model for Proust's exploration of seascapes and landscapes—made his novels some of the most profound visual experiences in Western literature. Harrison's deeply emotional response to his subject matter, so different from the dry academic modes of French art during the period, inspired Proust to probe his memories for the underlying symbolic structure of landscape. "[O]nce I was in the studio; I felt perfectly happy, for, with the help of all the sketches and studies that surrounded me, I foresaw the possibility of raising myself to a poetical understanding, rich in delights, of manifold forms which I had hitherto isolated from the total spectacle of reality. And Elstir's studio appeared to me like the laboratory of a sort of new creation of the world... The rare moments in which we see nature as she is, poetically, were those from which Elstir's work was created. One of the metaphors that occurred most frequently in the seascapes which surrounded him here was precisely that which, comparing land with sea, suppressed all demarcation between them. It was this comparison, tacitly and untiringly repeated on a single canvas, which gave it that multiform and powerful unity, the cause (not always clearly perceived by themselves) of the enthusiasm which Elstir's work aroused in certain collectors."[149]

Proust's observations about Elstir's/Harrison's fascination with seascape as a kind of landscape-of-the-imagination is vividly displayed in Harrison's pastel, *Blue Moonlight*, fig. 7.38. Harrison uses the brown ground of the board (as Whistler had done in his pastels of Venice) as an integral part of the composition, and in so doing creates an ambiguous pictorial rendering in which the sea's surface also reads as sandy shore, while echoing the broken blue and dun tones in the sky. The resulting "multiform" unity of means and ends constitutes a quintessential Proustian experience of memory as metamorphosis, in which the interchangeability—and interpenetration—of visual symbols both harmonizes and simplifies a complex visual field. Even the angle of perception, offering few clues as to an actual fixed vantage point, a technique first exploited by Whistler (and John La Farge) from his study of Japanese prints, was much admired by Proust, who then employed high, low, and cropped perspectives in his own off-kilter and beguiling descriptions of landscape. "Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be

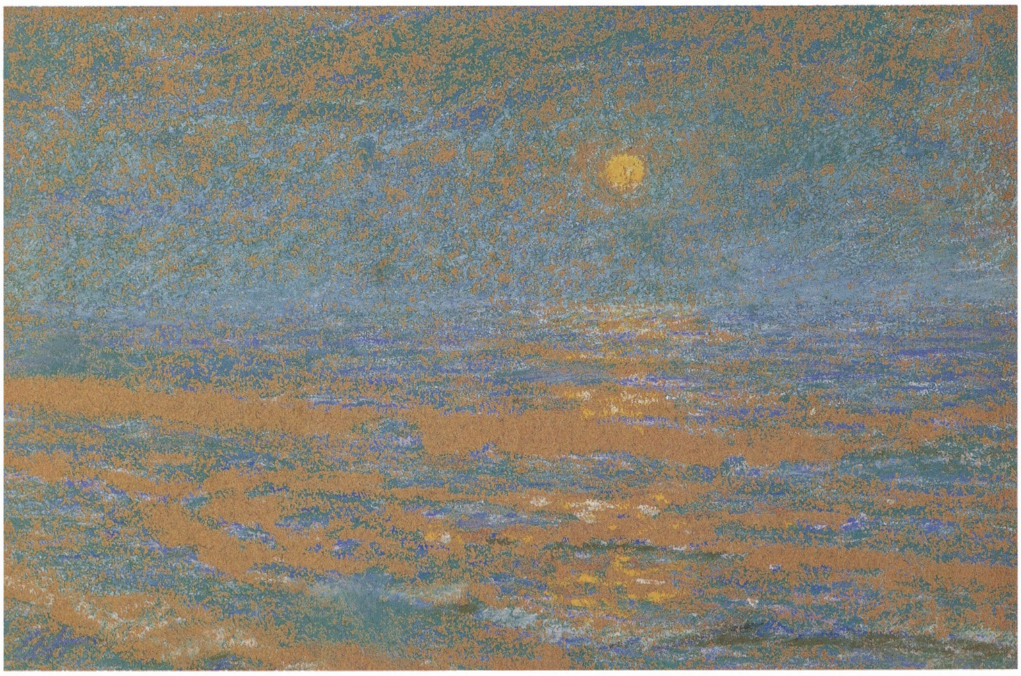


Fig. 7.38. Alexander Harrison, *Blue Moonlight*, c. 1900. Pastel on board, 7 x 10 in. Private collection.

but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him precisely to bring out certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since art had been the first to disclose them."[150]

Proust's descriptions of Elstir/Harrison (the tall and debonair Harrison surely attracted the young Proust) and his art were written decades later in a retrospective mode, when the artist and his work had suffered a decline in appreciation, as had Whistler's reputation. But the seminal example of Harrison's artistic modus summoned from his memories of days past in Beg-Meil—and of course his childhood in Illiers and Paris—forever stamped Proust the stylist and literary philosopher who wrote descriptions of landscapes as if they were paintings and often uncanny verbal approximations of the Tonalist style. "Close to the shore, patches of vapour, soot-black but with the burnish and consistency of agate, visibly solid and palpable, were trying to rise one above another over the sea in ever wider tiers, so that the highest of them, poised on top of the twisted column and over-reaching the centre of gravity of those, which had hitherto supported them, seemed on the point of bringing down in ruin this lofty structure already half-way up the sky, and precipitating it into the sea." (see fig. 3.43. Alexander Harrison, *Low Tide Brittany*, c. 1890)[151] Even more to the point, Elstir/Harrison imbues the narrator with a love of poetic metaphor, very much at the heart of the Tonalist style. "I would now happily remain at table while it was being cleared, and ... it was no longer solely towards the sea that I would turn my eyes. Since I had seen such things depicted in the water colours by Elstir, I sought to find again in reality, I cherished as though for their poetic beauty ... the half empty glass which thus showed to greater advantage the noble sweep of its curved sides and, in the heart of its translucent crystal, clear as frozen daylight, some dregs of wine, dark but glittering with reflected lights, the displacement of solid objects, the transmutation of liquids by the effect of light and shade, the shifting colors of the plums which passed from green to blue and from blue to golden yellow in the half plundered dish. ..."[152]

Proust's hypnotic attraction to translucent, water-reflected, and refracted light seems almost certainly inspired by Harrison's marines. Most strikingly of all, in terms of the Tonalist style, is how Proust's epiphanies translate the commonplace of landscape into symbolic forms and patterns. "Suddenly I was overwhelmed with a profound happiness which I had not felt since Combray ... I had just seen, standing a little way back from the hog's-back road along which we were traveling, three trees which probably marked the entry to a covered driveway and formed a pattern which I was not seeing for the first time ... I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it could not grasp, as when an object is placed out of our reach, so that our fingers, stretched out at arm's length, can only touch for a moment its outer surface, without managing to take hold of anything ... I watched the trees gradually recede, waving their despairing arms, seeming to say to me: 'What you fail to learn from us today, you will never know. If you allow us to drop back into the hollow of this road from which we sought to raise ourselves to you, a whole part of yourself which we were bringing to you will vanish forever into thin air. ...'"[153] Proust's feeling for nature's symbolic countenance, replete with intimations of some otherworldly realm, of an unseen presence

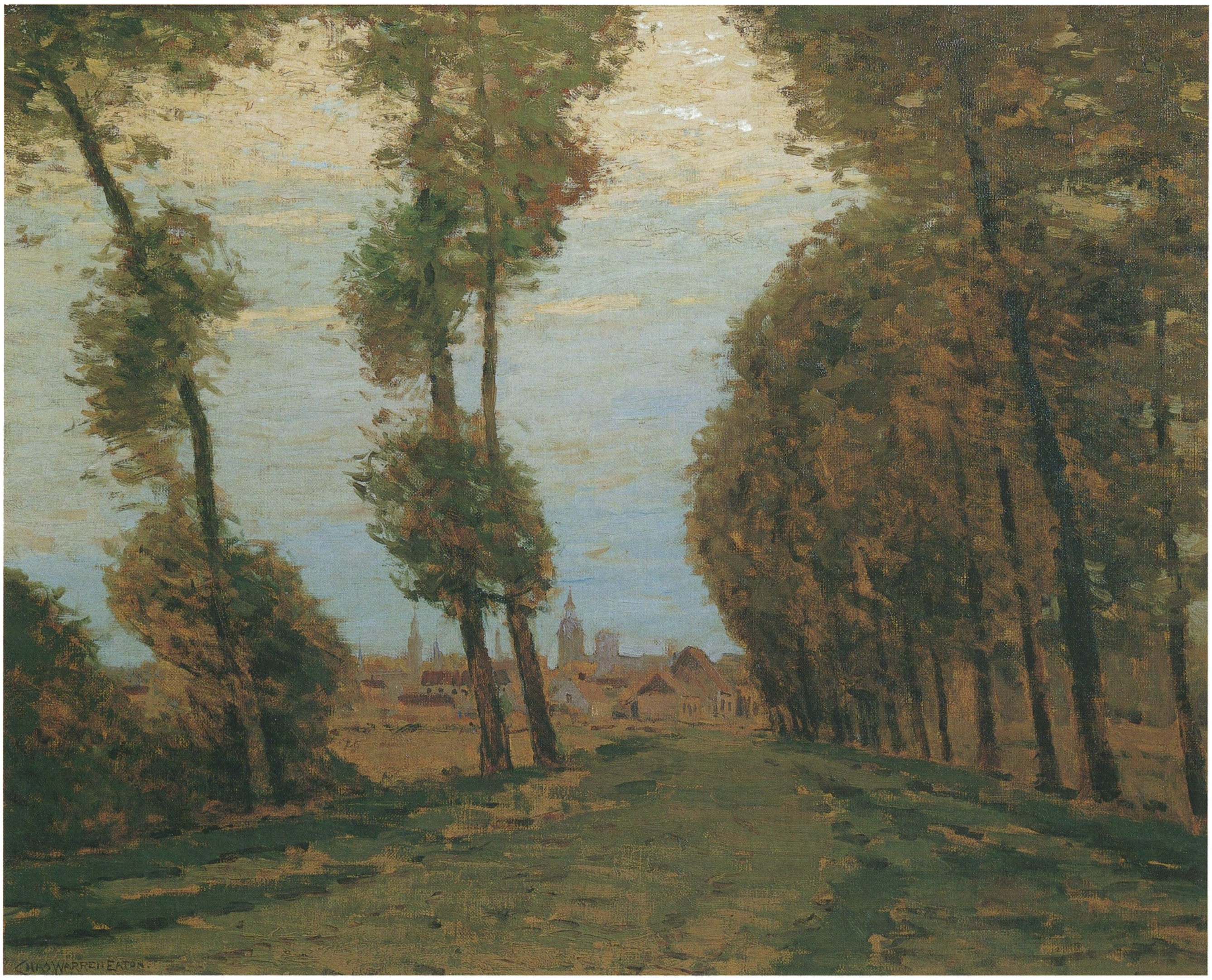


Fig. 7.39. Charles Warren Eaton, *Environs of Bruges*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Private collection.

harking back to time-out-of-mind—ideas he certainly found in Emerson—is writ throughout the work of Tonalists like Inness, Tryon, and Charles Warren Eaton. Eaton, who spent many summers working in Bruges between 1900 and 1910, caught something of Proust's wistful dreaminess in his paintings of poplars lining the nearby canals, such as *Environs of Bruges*, circa 1905 (fig. 7.39); bathed in soft humid light, the sinuous trunks and biomorphic-shaped bows weaving tantalizing patterns provided evocative subjects for Symbolist painters of all stripes, most notably Claude Monet, whose work Proust knew well.

Nor was Proust's formative experience of Harrison and his art restricted to the realm of aesthetics. Proust, through the character of Elstir, expressed the guiding principles of his literary enterprise, what he called "the lesson of the master." As the artist and narrator return from a walk, Elstir instructs the young Marcel not to regret the mistakes of youth but to use them as guideposts on the journey to wisdom. "We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one else can take for us, an effort which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world…But we must not deny the truth of it [the mistakes of youth], for it is evidence that we have really lived, that it is in accordance with the laws of life and of the mind that we have, from the common elements of life, of the life of studios, of artistic groups—assuming that one is a painter—extracted something that goes beyond them."[154] This moral imperative expounded by Elstir and finally embodied in Proust's literary masterpiece insists that art must fully and faithfully encompass the good and bad of life, or as Roger Shattuck, one of Proust's greatest interpreters observed: "The novel unfolds a lifetime of experience, which enlarges our understanding of love and nature, memory and snobbery. One of the principal messages that emerges is that literature, with its marvelous advantages of transparency and structure and timing, does not stand superior to life: it serves life. Proust's instructive novel seeks to show us the springs of life—not in a work of art but in ourselves."[155] In this, one is immediately reminded of Inness's clarion call for art that inspires us to feel deeply, for art that reflects the emotion of the creator to the viewer and so bring him closer to the subjective essence of creation. In this, Inness set his seal on the Tonalist movement's underlying moral imperative: the best art serves life by mirroring our most profoundly felt responses to nature—a stance writ large throughout Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*.

Harrison's expatriate perspective—the outsider's keyed-up response to the commonplace—may well have sparked the twenty-four-year-old Proust's literary ambitions. Through Harrison, Proust imbibed something of the American expatriate experience in Brittany (translated in the novels to Normandy), especially the heightened awareness of soft, translucent grays and a kind of naïve infatuation for pure landscape as an essential adjunct to the mindscape of memory. It is not too much to suggest that Alexander Harrison and Whistler, abetted by Proust's fascination with Emersonian symbolism, and Ruskin's poetic descriptions of landscape (the English aesthetic movement and fashion for all things English in France at this time also played a part), did much to shape the writer's focus on landscape as the central prism of memory, the places remembered from childhood and youth which, more often than not, act as protagonists in their own right across the sprawling vastness of *In Search of Lost Time*. This was a debt to Anglo-American sensibilities that Proust readily acknowledged: "In England people would not laugh at me if I said I was going to Amiens to see the statue that Ruskin loved, or to Touraine to try and find the bend in the river Loire that Turner painted. Let's hope that soon French people will not make fun of those things."[156] In this, the Tonalist movement in America—with Whistler and Harrison in the vanguard—far from simply being an offshoot of European artistic modes, acted as a progressive force in its own right, playing a significant role in the development of the fin-de-siècle Symbolist movement in European art and literature.

At its core, Proust's elegiac imagery, intimating the seasonality of all things, provides a window into the metaphysics of the human relationship with the natural world. For Proust, not unlike the post–Civil War generation of Tonalists, most of the people he associated with scenes of his childhood were long dead—his beloved village of Combray (at least in his fiction) destroyed in World War I—by the time he was writing about them. One is reminded how Walt Whitman, after his years as a nurse in a Civil War hospital, spent the remainder of his life revising *Leaves of Grass* to reflect the horror he had experienced. This religious dimension, the existential role of elegiac art—beyond mere truth telling, or delight in the beauty of the art object—was noted by the Tonalist painter Dwight Tryon near the end of his life: "Art is properly concerned with the living of our lives . . . and instinctive sense that there must be some way through it to reach an understanding that redemption does exist."[157] Emerson, too, felt that art played a profound part in humankind's search for meaning, noting the cross-fertilization, or mutual illumination, of artist and nature (subject and object): "[A] work of art throws light upon the mystery of humanity. A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature . . . The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance on the world on one point, and each in his several work to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce."[158]

Denis Dutton, in *The Art Instinct*, writes that Harvard University biologist E. O. Wilson has taken Emerson's insights one step further, positing that art is a central adaptive feature of mankind: "'There was not enough time for human heredity to cope with the vastness of the new contingent possibilities revealed by high intelligence,' Wilson says: 'the arts filled the gap,' allowing human beings to develop more flexible and sophisticated responses to new situations.'"[159] Dutton further develops Wilson's arguments—and those of other researchers, writing that art and feeling are inextricably mixed, noting the *emotional saturation* that an artwork produces. "Emotional feeling is normally *coextensive with the experience of a work of art*. Stated another way, fictions do not provide narrative context, then add emotion: they tend rather to establish a tone, mood, or feeling immediately and make continuous use of emotion."[160] This was precisely the adaptive flexibility displayed by Tonalism, a non-narrative and superbly efficient delivery system of embodied emotion. The Tonalists were able to follow through on Inness's conviction that art succeeded only so well as it seamlessly communicated the artist's feelings to the viewer. Tonalism's achievement, in the words of Dutton and Wilson, regarding the origins and efficacy of art in the evolution of culture, was that it provided "flexible and sophisticated responses to new situations."

Eaton, a friend and follower of Inness, by ruthlessly paring down his art during the first thirty years of his career, pursued just such an immediacy of emotion and carrying power. He employed Emerson's Transcendentalist vision and Thoreau's concrete metaphors, refined through Darwin's mutable lens, to conceive an art responsive to the most vital needs of his public. Eaton's widely exhibited 1908 painting *Evening in Connecticut* (fig. 7.40), is an iconic example of the artist's quest for essentials. Here, the world of nature is reduced to its basics: horizontals of seamless landscape and nacreous sky, and perpendicular accents of pine trees absorbing the day's last light. The grand simplicity engulfs the gaze of the viewer in the same way the hovering, dissolving planes of saturated color in a Mark Rothko canvas draw the eye toward a dematerialized sublime. A feeling of displacement, of being outside time, is evoked by the absolute stillness of the scene, in which the

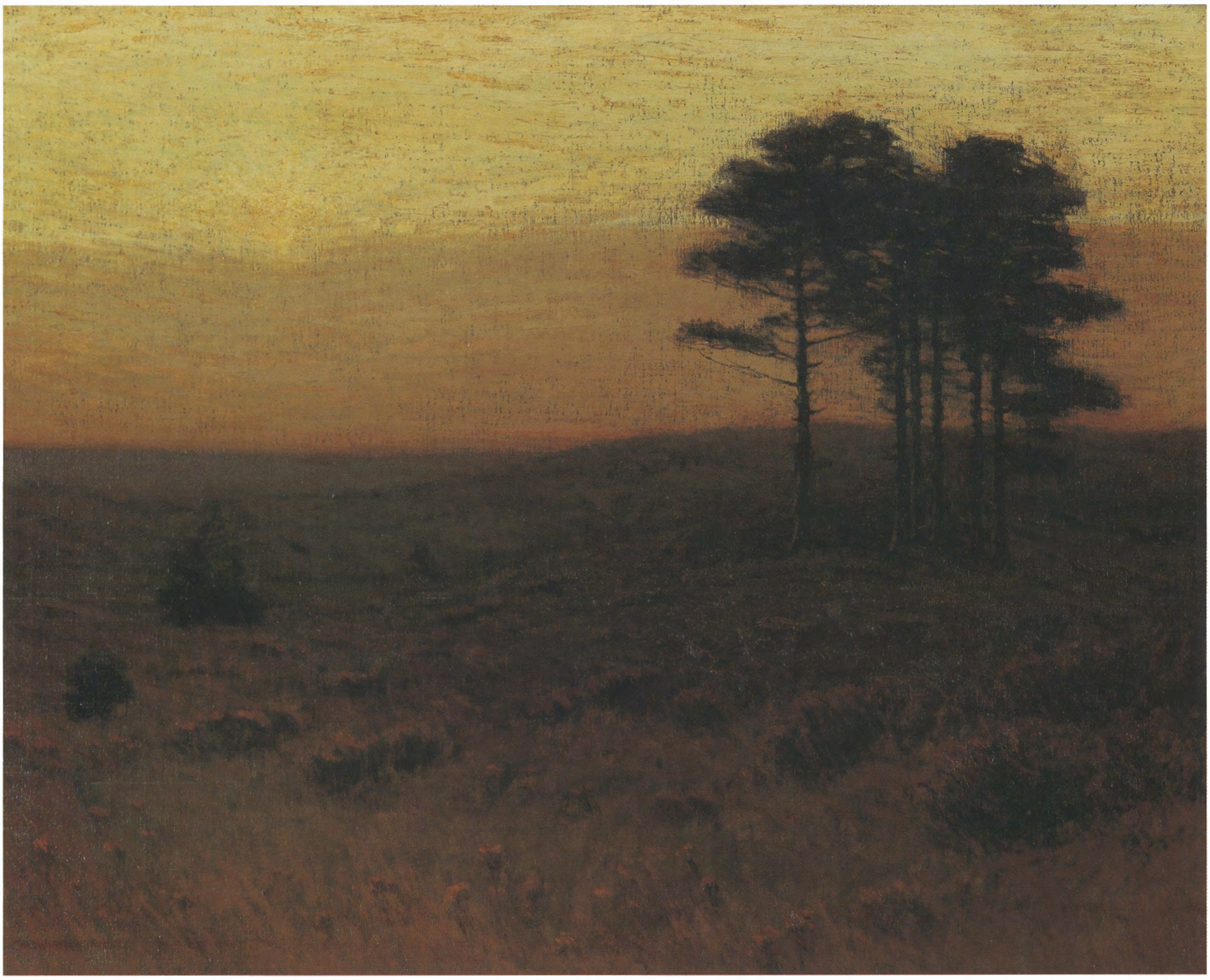


Fig. 7.40. Charles Warren Eaton, *Evening in Connecticut*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 36 x 45 in. Marty O'Brien Collection of American Art, Sewickley, PA.

material world has been distilled into pure spirit—where the spirit of metamorphosis reigns. This sense of transcendence is aptly stated by Emerson in his lecture on religion, in which he asserts that all humans seek those rare moments of solitude and silence in which "this deep power in which we lie and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object are one."[139]

In the Indian summer of the Tonalist movement, Eaton produced a requiem for an age, the spiritual imagery in which a generation took heart after the trauma of the Civil War's bloodletting. Charles de Kay recognized Eaton's contribution as such, as a tattered flag on the sunset, symbol of Millet's immortal "lachrymae rerum," although he was quick to point out that art was less about progress and more about change, that every art and artist is a manifestation of a time and place, and each a season of the human spirit. Eaton's image of simplicity and order links past, present, and future: a timeless continuum of mystical accord that releases the weary and anxiety-ridden from the burdens of the moment. John La Farge, in far-off Japan with his lifelong friend Henry Adams, reflecting on the seasons of great art and great artists, wrote of the human desire for balance and order. "This is why we remember so easily the arrangement and composition of such a one whom we call a master— that is why the 'silhouette' of a Millet against the sky, why his placing of outlines within the rectangle of his picture, makes a different, a final and decisive result, impressed strongly upon the memory which classifies it, when you compare it with the record of the same story, say, by Jules Breton. It is not the difference of the fact in nature, it is not that the latter artist is not in love with his subject, that he has not a poetic nature, that he is not simple, that he has not dignity, that he is not exquisite; it is that he has not found in nature of his own instinct the eternal mathematics which accompany facts of sight. For indeed, to use other words, in what does one differ from the other? The arrangement of the idea or subject may be the same... But he, Millet, if we take this instance, is framed within a larger line, its spaces are of greater or more subtle ponderation, its building together more architectural. That is to say, all its spaces are more surely related to *one another*, and not only to the *story told*, nor only to the *accidental occurrence* of the same. The eternal has been brought in to sustain the transient."[162]

Thoreau and Darwin: "The Eternal Mathematics"—An Art of Metamorphosis and Memory

In *Autumn, New England*, circa 1910 (fig. 7.41), Charles Warren Eaton achieved a visual equivalency of what Thoreau and Emerson were moving toward, what La Farge described as the "eternal mathematics," the eternal sustaining the transient; the merging of matter and spirit in absolute nature. For La Farge, the artistic experience was an expression of an innate love of "certain balanced proportions and relations which the mind likes to discover," much as Thoreau and Darwin were drawn to discover similar forces of stability and change in nature. La Farge thought these desires were embedded in human consciousness: "[I]n my unexpressed faith, these needs are as needs of the soul, the echoes of the laws of the universe, seen and unseen, reflections of the universal mathematics, cadences of the ancient music of the spheres."[163] Writing in 1886, La Farge was clearly influenced by Darwin, as he was by Buddhism, while his "needs of the soul," echoing the Old Testament and Emerson, hint at the later discoveries of evolutionary biology that posit a predisposition for belief in such underlying laws of the universe and the inheritances that condition the human mind to respond to certain natural symbols. This was the "invisible" world that hovered out of sight, tantalizing such radical conservatives as La Farge and Inness. It touched directly on the spiritual insights of Emerson, and the recurring natural cycles and hidden pattern structures in nature detected by Thoreau. Darwin had hinted at such vestigial memories carried in the genes from our earliest ancestors, while Proust had sought them in the embedded layers of childhood memory. George Inness tried the impossible: to make the invisible, visible; his late synthetic style was directed at that goal and he failed as often as he succeeded. On the wider public stage,

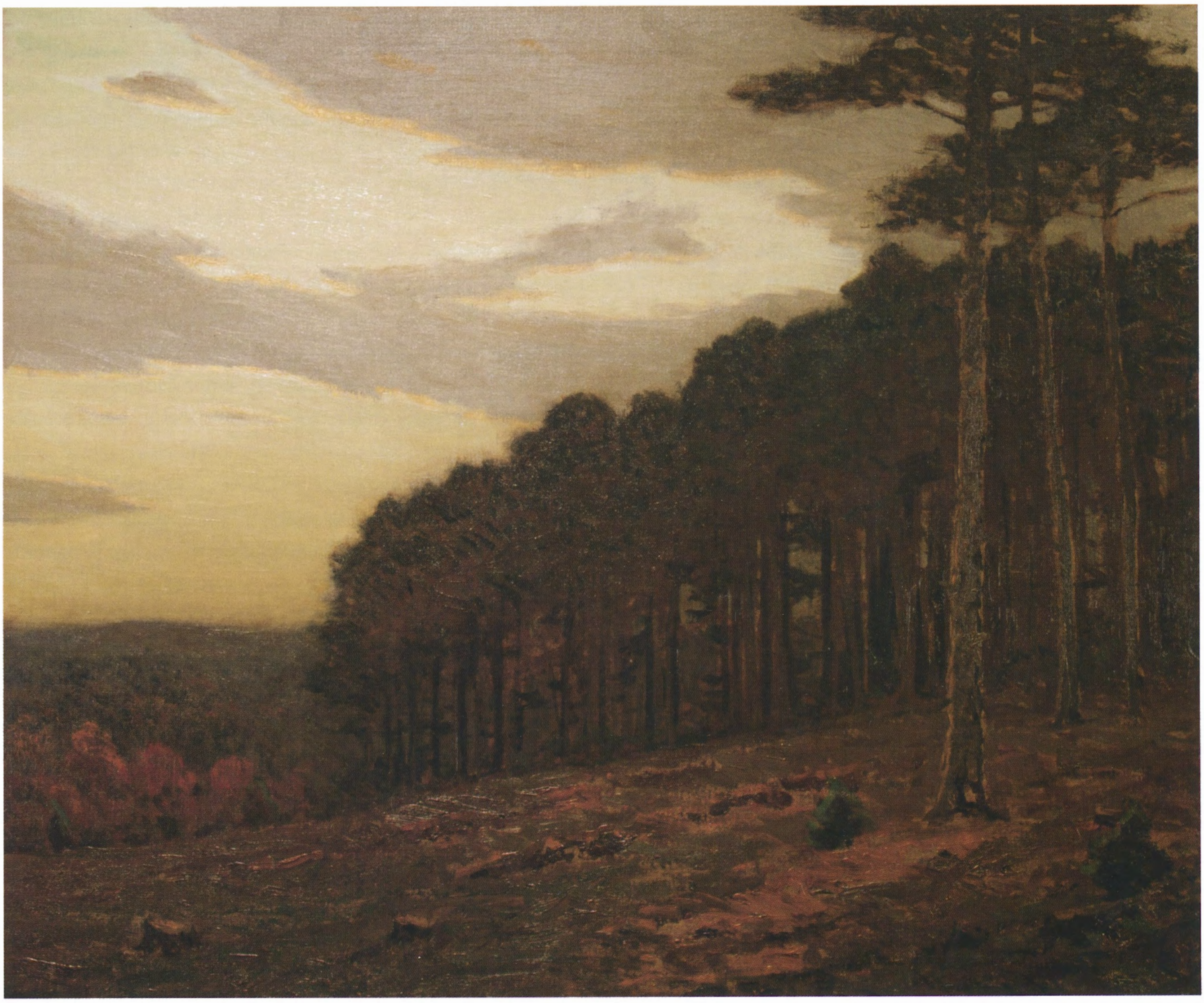


Fig. 7.41. Charles Warren Eaton, *Autumn, New England*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36, Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

Inness's triumph represented an artistic solution or adaptation to the heated frictions of religious and philosophical dispute of his day, which the shock of the Civil War had brought to a fever pitch. Charles de Kay, as early as 1882, in describing the stages of Inness's development, had recognized this very point: that Inness's original genius was formed in the crucible of the Civil War, bringing about "a post-war style, in which he now works without loss of the good in his previous efforts, but with complete control of his art. If big words are not out of place, the present may be called his synthetic style as opposed to the analytic of the days before the war."[164]

Inness, of course, would never have described his art in Darwinian terms per se, even as Darwin's ideas filled contemporary discussions about life and art and became a lingua franca in progressive circles. But the dynamic and inherent rhythms of metamorphosis fueled his work, the same confluence of spirit and matter that had captivated Thoreau: a thing of ultimate mystery because it remained ever in flux, forever changed by the very act of perception. This was the elusive mystery that Inness tried to capture in his art, a pursuit that frustrated him to his dying day. His son, George Inness Jr., described it this way: "How often have you, while wandering through a wood, seen forms that look like things you know. Sometimes you think it is a man strolling through the far-away field, to find later that it is only a withered stump or clump of grass; or perhaps a spot of light that speaks of sparkling water where you may slake your thirst proves to be, on near approach, nothing but a whitened rock that is peeping from the underbrush. Nature is full of sounds and forms that awaken the imagination and fill the earth with vibrancy and with life. It is this that Inness gives you in his canvases. He gives you nature with all her subtlety."[165]

George Inness Jr., an artist in his own right, who had stood at his father's elbow for hours and days at a time as he painted, understood Inness's never-ending struggle to translate the mystery in nature to canvas, to visualize life's uncertainty—instability, change, chaos—and yet keep it within predictable and manageable bounds. "A work of art must have subtlety of tone and a certain amount of mystery that can never be seen as first glance. It must be looked at a long time before its subtle tones can be grasped; and if it is great, it grows upon you, and the longer you look, the more you see, and to describe it is almost impossible, because you never see it twice alike. It changes with your mood. It is a thing to live with. You study it, you learn to see the soul of it. It is like a face that becomes beautiful because you have learned to know and love the soul behind it. When a picture gives you this effect, it is great art. This is the greatness of Inness."[166]

By 1900, Eaton and Foster, Murphy, Kost, and Tryon, taking up the lead of the first-generation Tonalists—La Farge, Hunt, and Whistler, Inness, Wyant, and Martin—had developed a range of landscape imagery that offered spiritual solace across a broad spectrum of religious and philosophical outlooks. Tonalism's non-narrative and therefore non-doctrinaire ambiguity provided a kind of compromise between the forces of change and tradition, between those who had enlisted Darwin to promote various social and political agendas, and those who had a more traditional need for a divine overseer of creation. Aesthetically, this was achieved by subtle tonal modulations that preserved both nature's integrity and its inherent mystery—the suggestion of unseen forces in the play of tones and the movement of soft-edged forms, in the same way that metamorphosis, poetically understood, is a process of change without change, or as the religiously inclined might term it, a picture of eternity. Impressionism was rejected, not because it was avant-garde, but because its stylistic limitations had caused it to fall into desuetude among cutting-edge modernists. Tonalism appealed to the enlightened who called for a progressive art, while preserving for the more tradition-minded an intelligible spiritual context. The Tonalist landscape was mysterious yet comforting. Tonalism embodied in abstract landscape form an enduring trope of Western thought since the Greeks, and since Ovid and Goethe and the Romantics: the ceaseless dynamic of metamorphosis and the transmutation of one thing into another. The Tonalist landscape, like Thoreau's prose, was only as alive as the respondent's sensitivity to the life around him, to the mutability of form in the flick of the artist's brush and the poet's metaphor, the vibration and refraction of light and color on canvas—a thing, like memory, often more sensuously immediate than its source in the objective world. Such moments of epiphany exist only in the eye of the beholder, when the outer life gives way to the inner, and vice versa.

Metamorphosis, so understood, is fundamentally an act of memory or recollection. Recent advances in brain science have demonstrated that each time we access a memory of a past event, we subtly change the memory, literally in the brain matter of neural transmitters that stores it, thus inevitably altering how we remember it. Tonalism encompasses a fundamentally Proustian exercise of memory, which is metamorphic in feeling and fluctuates in repeating currents through the subconscious. Unlike the Impressionist ideal of capturing the momentary, Tonalism, as Charles Caffin pointed out, did not sacrifice the analysis of values or the facts of form, but sought the malleable and amorphous embodied in the concrete symbol.[167] From Thoreau to Proust, from Inness to Whistler and Henry James, from Murphy to Foster, Eaton, and Tryon—memory was understood as the key adjunct to artistic endeavor; it was the filter through which time's flight was slowed and the emotions enhanced. For Inness, the divine and aesthetic life were combined through memory, the inner and outer forces of the soul harnessed in tandem to produce the synergistic harmony he continually attempted to achieve in his art. Memory was the

Fig. 7.42. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, photographed in 1903.

key to life's enchantment. Although Inness used field sketches and observed nature frequently, he mostly painted in the studio from memory; his art, like that of Murphy, was conceptualist in essence. Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911; fig. 7.42), an extraordinary Boston abolitionist, captain of black troops during the Civil War, writer and editor of Emily Dickinson's poetry, and superb naturalist, wrote of the crucial role of memory in capturing the emotion of enchantment. "For that which is remembered is often more vivid than that which is seen. The eye paints better in the presence, the heart in the absence, of the object most dear: 'He who longs after beautiful Nature can best describe her,' said Bettine; 'he who is in the midst of her loveliness can only lie down and enjoy.' It enhances the truth of the poet's verses, that he writes them in his study. Absence is the very air of passion, and all the best description *in memoriam*. As with our human beloved, when the graceful presence is with us, we cannot analyze or describe, but merely possess, and only after its departure can it be portrayed by our yearning desires; so is it with Nature: only in losing her do we gain the power to describe her, and we are introduced to Art, as we are to Eternity, by the dropping away of our companions."[168]

Higginson's association of memory with death and loss further underlines the elegiac temperament of the writer's time. Such an understanding of memory and metamorphosis was central to the Aesthetic movement, and later the Symbolists and their preoccupations with dreams and the unconscious. By 1900, Emerson and Thoreau and Inness—with Darwin and Whistler providing the scientific cachet and cosmopolitan polish—were demigods for the aesthetically minded. Art for art's sake had become a secular creed for some—a "science for the soul," as the modernist critic Sadakichi Hartmann put it—a consolation for many, and a necessary adjunct to an upscale lifestyle for two generations. But the triumph of Tonalism in these years as a quietest art was to prove its Achilles' heel in decades to come. As the expressive and symbolist energies inherent in the style gained in power, the quieter Whistlerian overtones, the formal charms of pattern and equipoise, began to be downplayed. In turn, the spiritual impetus at the core of the Tonalist movement, energized by late-Victorian values, slowly faded under the impact of modernist creeds that had little interest in matters of the soul. And yet, because the style appeared to be so rooted in human nature, both adaptable to and expressive of very human needs, it would reemerge in countless new guises in the twentieth century—a cultural adaptation beautifully fitted to survive the vicissitudes of changing fashion.

Darwin and Tonalism: "Absolute Nature is the Essence of All Things"

Something of the complexity of spirit at the heart of the Tonalist movement, especially in matters of the soul, is glimpsed in John La Farge's *An Artist's Letters from Japan*, first published in *The Century Magazine* in 1886. "Here at least, I am not forced to consider external nature as separate and opposed, and I can fall into moods of thought,—or, if you prefer, of feeling,—in which the edges of all things blend, and man and the outside world pass into each other... And so, often, I like to think of these trees and rocks and streams, as if from them might be evolved some spiritual essence. Has not Cakyamuni said that all (living) beings possess the nature of Buddha, that is to say, the absolute nature. The sun, the moon, the earth, and the innumerable stars contain within themselves the absolute, and all form a part of it, however great, however small. Absolute nature is the essence of all things, and is the same as all things. This absolute nature will be as are the waters of the sea, if we picture it, and its modes will be as the waves, inseparable from the waters. Thus the absolute and all things will be identical, inseparable views of the same existence... This wind whistling through the trees, the river breaking over its rocks, the movements of man and his voice,—or, indeed, his silence,—are the expression of the great mysteries of body, of word, and of thought. These mysteries are understood of the Buddha, but evolution, cultivated by the 'true word,' or doctrine, will allow man, whose mysteries are like the mysteries of the Buddhas, to become like unto them."[169]

These thoughts, appearing in a mass-circulation publication that, in the 1880s and 1890s, had a comparable influence to *Time Magazine* in its heyday after World War II, offer clues to how much Charles Darwin (fig. 7.43) had altered the accepted standards and parameters of American spirituality. Three years before, *The Century Magazine* had run a long article on

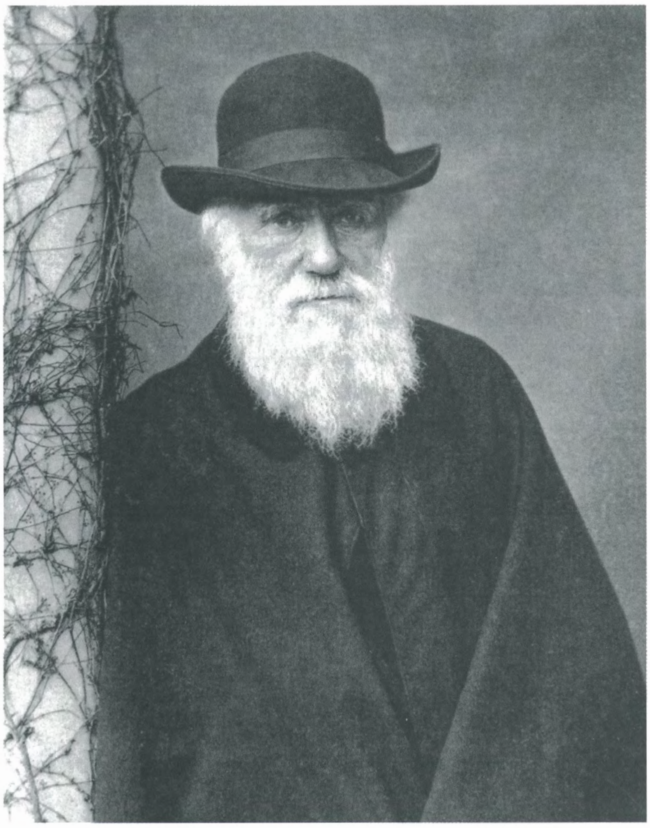


Fig. 7.43. Charles Darwin, photographed in 1881.

Darwin titled “The Debt of Science to Darwin,” in which the writer, Alfred R. Wallace, asks rhetorically: “What has Darwin done, that even those who most strongly oppose his theories rarely suggest that he is overrated? Why is it universally felt that the only name with which his can be compared in the whole domain of science is that of the illustrious Newton?”[170] Significantly, Wallace, whose own discoveries on natural selection had prompted Darwin to publish his *Origin of Species*, focused on substantiating the genius of Darwin’s painstaking work in nitty-gritty science; for the readers of the *Century*, the adverse implications of the theory for traditional religion, if not moot, were secondary to tangible scientific proofs. Perhaps even more remarkable is that Wallace dismisses those outmoded views, not as benighted or beholden to the dead forms of Emerson, but as lazy and inattentive—lacking the imagination to fully grasp the infinite glories of nature. These views were in contrast to Darwin, “whose teachings were at first stigmatized as degrading or even atheistical, by devoting to the varied phenomena of living things the loving, patient, and reverent study of one who really had *faith* in the beauty and harmony and perfection of creation, was enabled to bring to light innumerable hidden adaptations, and to prove that the most insignificant parts of the meanest living things had a use and a purpose, were worthy of our earnest study, and fitted to excite our highest and most intelligent admiration.”[171] Wallace’s thrill of discovery and his emphasis on a near-religious faith in the “beauty and harmony and perfection of creation” echo not just Inness’s obsessions with the hidden adaptations, the unseen metamorphosis in nature, but also Thoreau’s ceaseless explorations in search of the invisible transmitters of cause and effect in the organic world (neither he nor Darwin understood in their lifetimes the underlying force of genetic inheritance) that unified all things. Wallace’s appeal to the intellectual curiosity of *The Century Magazine*’s readership is only another indication of the appeal of Darwin’s ideas to a broad, growing, and highly sophisticated audience.

Only twenty years before, in 1860, when Thoreau read *On the Origin of Species*, and when La Farge was just beginning his dissection of the vital properties of light and color on American shores—not unlike the inductive observations of both Darwin and Thoreau—Darwin’s theories began to lay the framework for a sea change in the apprehension of everything under the sun. Thoreau was just forty-two, and had only two years to live before dying of tuberculosis in 1862. He had already read Darwin’s *Voyage of the Beagle* and must have suspected much of where Darwin was going with his inquiries. Thoreau and Darwin were much alike, their questions prompted by their deep love and enchantment with nature. The laws they sought, the dynamic of change, were not iron-clad categories, but liberators of the human spirit. Thoreau never lived quite long enough to prove his theory of seed dispersion, which followed along the lines of Darwin’s inquiries into natural selection and common descent with modification. Thoreau had been on the trail of what connected man and nature and the spiritual laws that governed that relationship virtually all his life, as had Emerson on a more abstract plane—what La Farge had described in *The Century Magazine* as a feeling or mood of thought, “in which the edges of all things blend, and man and the outside world pass into each other.” Such a synthesis conjoined the metamorphic fluidity of Darwin, the Buddhist essence of absolute nature, and Thoreau’s understanding of the material-spiritual confluence. For the fleeting decades of the Tonalist era, science and spirituality managed a grand symbiotic embrace. Emerson lived to extol Darwin, certainly in spirit. In death as in life, Thoreau never flinched from the truth. If natural selection meant nature red in tooth and claw, so be it. If chance, fate, or simply the cycles of birth and decay and death were the human lot, as with all living things, so be it: better a right perception of the underlying patterns of life—the inherent beauty of meaning therein—than a false identity based on an ersatz paradise that removes mankind from the chain of being that gives rise to life. Something of the indeterminacy of such a life, in which the edges of all things blend, is expressed in the Tonalist aesthetic, and found in Tonalist painter Albert L. Groll’s (1866–1952) *Foggy Shore*, circa 1900 (fig. 7.44), which depicts a hazy figure on a dark shore seemingly lost in contemplation.

Thoreau probably found great comfort in Darwin’s theory of common descent—as it was then known before the term

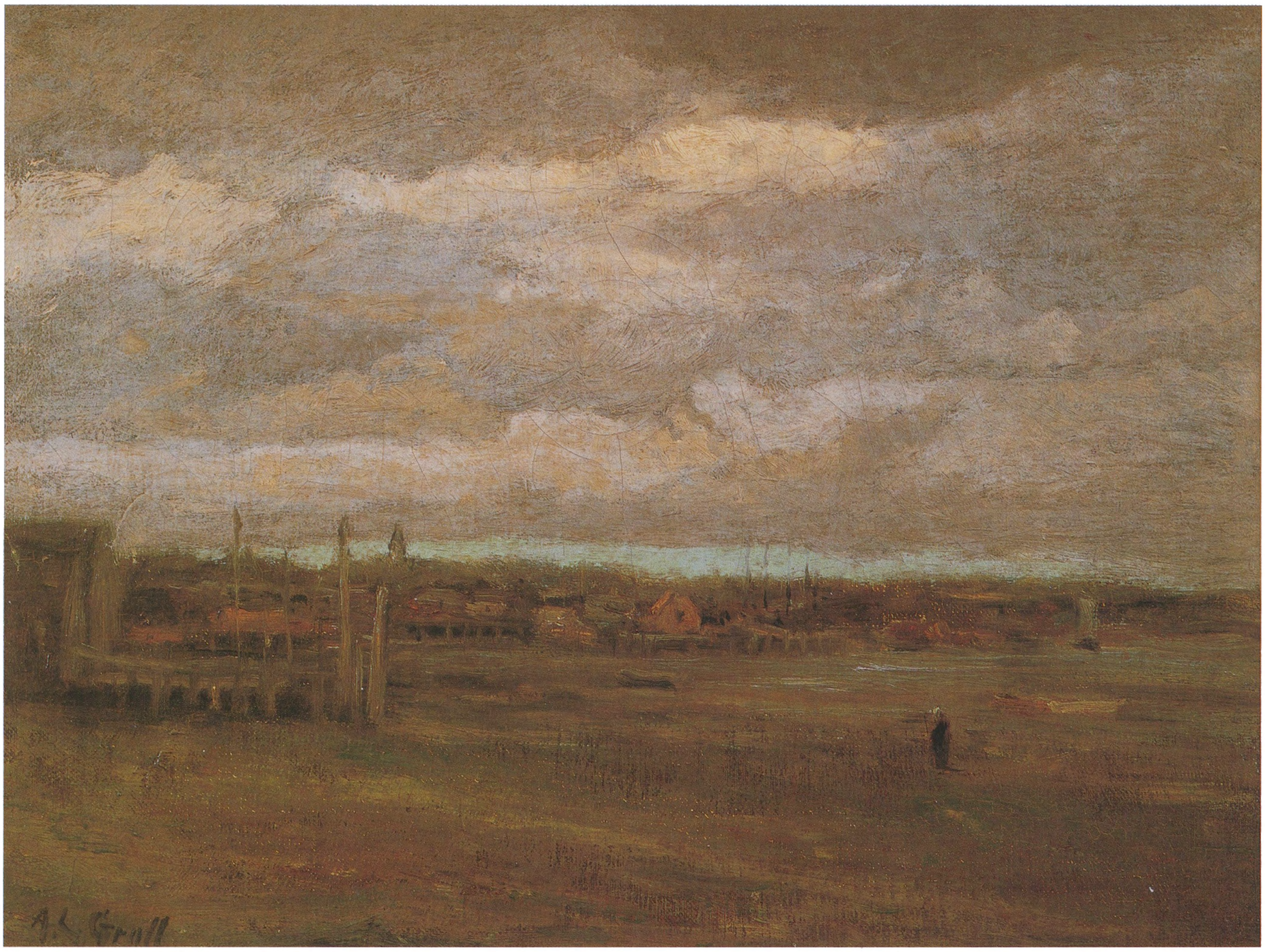


Fig. 7.44. Albert L. Groll, *Foggy Shore*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

"evolution" became widely used—because it offered the key to the conundrum he had been exploring, both in his role as naturalist and as poet-philosopher: if man is integral to the natural order and so shares the highs and lows that fate allows all, then man's knowledge of that fate, of his shared fate, is not a curse or a cross to bear but a manifestation of his glory and the animating spirit of all his creations. Thoreau noted in his journal of January 5, 1860, "A man receives only what he is ready to receive, whether physically or intellectually or morally, as animals conceive at certain seasons their kind only. We hear and apprehend only what we already half know."[172] With reports of Darwin's theory, he must have felt that he had been staring at the answer the whole time—a solution hiding in plain sight. Three years earlier he had written in his journal, "These regular phenomena of the seasons get at last to be—they were at first, of course—simply and plainly phenomena or phases of my life. The seasons and all their changes are in me. I see not a dead eel or floating snake, or a gull, but it rounds my life and is like a line or accent in its poem. Almost I believe the Concord would not rise and overflow its banks again, were I not here. After a while I learn what my moods and seasons are. I would have nothing subtracted. I can imagine nothing added. My moods are thus periodical, not two days in my year alike. The perfect correspondence of Nature to man, so that he is at home in her!"[173]

Dwight Tryon, who read Thoreau the way some read their Scripture, echoes his master from the perspective of the artist. "Discovery or knowledge of the great laws of nature makes creation possible in art... Mystery, infinity. A painter who feels these truths in nature is humble. He frankly acknowledges there is something that cannot be painted. But this draws him on, and the highest and most lasting things are these suggestions. In this striving for the spiritual, the higher the whole, so insensibly but surely parts come to belong to the whole."[174] Thoreau, like La Farge and his artist acolyte, Dwight Tryon, expressed the mystical resignation, the wonder and joy that accompanied acceptance of a contingent oneness with the natural order. Herman Melville's Ahab may have cried out in anger and frustration at his unfulfilled desire to strike through the mask of nature, to discover the fate that the white whale, Moby Dick, represented to his monomaniacal eye, but Thoreau would have only smiled, knowing he had been on the scent right along:

nature was no *other,* but integral to the human soul. For the Tonalist artists a generation later, who had inherited not just Thoreau's legacy of joyous insight but also the terrible festering wounds of a war, Thoreau offered hope of a beneficent nature, a nature that contained reports of death as serenely as of life.

For those who cared enough to walk a path of solitude, nature was replete with ceaseless wonder, full of haunting patterns, stirring symbols, and an effluence of unexplorable atmospheres, a nature alive and mutable and forever in flux. The Tonalist artists who attempted to capture this flux—the last generation of artists to be fully galvanized by the cauldron of progressive, late-nineteenth-century American religiosity—were filled with nature's vital force in the very act of perception. For Dwight Tryon, who couched so many of his feelings about art in Darwinian terms, the life at the heart of nature was always his main aim, or as his biographer wrote, "But the first consideration of that aim is to awaken the sense of Nature's living loveliness, the sense of quivering grass and palpitating clouds, the sense of trees that feel the wind, although they do not bend beneath its weight."[175]

Oddly, such a sophisticate as Henry Adams, who had traveled the world with La Farge, felt out of place in late-nineteenth-century America, perhaps out of touch with "trees that feel the wind," an image that filled, not just Tryon's paintings, but those of his contemporaries. Adams liked to compare the empowering image of the Virgin in French thirteenth-century art with the great dynamos that were arriving in his day to power America's industrial boom. "All the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres."[176] Adams bemoaned the passing from the American mind of such a symbol, which had energized the creative forces of the medieval world. For such a perspicacious historian, he could be blind to the trends of his own place and time. He was certainly right: the old gods, the figurative symbols personified and magnified, had long passed from the Protestant-American imagination; they had been replaced by the more abstract spiritual forces intuited in nature. For an eighteenth-century man, as Adams liked to think of himself, such mystical abstractions lacked the concision preferred by a mind still keyed to the logic of the Enlightenment. This is perhaps why Adams was more mystified by La Farge, "a mind opaline with infinite shades and refractions of light and with color toned down to its finest gradations"—than enlightened.

For the generation of Americans born after 1840, the Tonalist landscape had become a kind of iconic talisman, as if the land itself spoke of regenerative powers—in the trees that feel the whistling wind and the river breaking over rocks, a living repository of that ancient clothonian power that had so fired the imagination of the Greeks, who had also indulged in fratricidal wars and prodigious bloodletting on nearby battlefields. Thoreau had blazed the trail in terms of recognizing the centrality of nature to a higher mode of awareness. Darwin had anchored that awareness in science and the progressive spirit of the age. Paradoxically, once the wilderness was conquered, the spirit life of nature became America's great inheritance, and thus the consolation for a fate that was as unknowable as it was inexorable, as haunting as it was comforting—especially for those privileged few who fully embraced solitude, and who, like Thoreau, could confront their mortality with equanimity. Charles Warren Eaton's elegiac *Berkshire Hills, Autumn,* circa 1910 (see fig. 6.57), belying its prosaic title, embodies Thoreau's spiritual-material essence, what Dwight Tryon understood as the fundamentally religious impulse behind a work of art. Tryon wrote: "How much of joy and life one has who is really in keen sympathy with beauty. It seems a pleasure almost too fine for this sphere and differentiates any one who possesses it from the common humanity. I cannot imagine a higher life than the rare moments when one is attuned to a really great art work; it seems to me to contain the essence of all religions and comes the nearest to true spiritual manifestations that are known."[177]

The historical correlations between Thoreau and Darwin are inescapable; their combined influence on late-nineteenth-century thinking, or, as La Farge's art and writings make clear, the imaginative merging of their visions in progressive circles, was all but ubiquitous. Faith, hope, and love, for many of the postwar generation was replaced with uncertainty, hope, and love of a kind: the consolations of a higher life, a private or inner life, devoted to the rare epiphanies experienced in nature and captured in art. By 1900, Americans' relationship with and understanding of nature had embraced the gospel of Thoreau, including the writings of literary naturalists like Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and wilderness advocates John Burroughs and John Muir, not to mention the intrepid adventuring of Theodore Roosevelt who, in his books, essays, and speeches, promoted the strenuous life. Between Thoreau's death in 1862 and 1900, the country saw the creation of urban parks (Frederick Law Olmsted's Central Park was designed to create the experience of an intimate landscape), vast national wilderness preserves (under Presidents Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt), country resorts, and summer homes from Maine to Florida and across the country. As the Hudson River School was replaced by the Tonalist movement, Calvinism by Transcendentalism, so nature was transformed from a threatening or commoditized "other" into a precious and ultimately personal spiritual resource. Thoreau and Darwin became seamlessly fused in the art of La Farge and Dwight Tryon, and in the writings of the outdoors-minded like Muir and Burroughs, while Roosevelt, a friend of both Muir and Burroughs, rated Thoreau second only to Burroughs as a woodland writer. Roosevelt, of course, was thoroughly a Darwinian: nature's dangers and hardships were part and parcel of its grandeur and consolation. When his wife and mother died on the same day, it was to the badlands of North Dakota

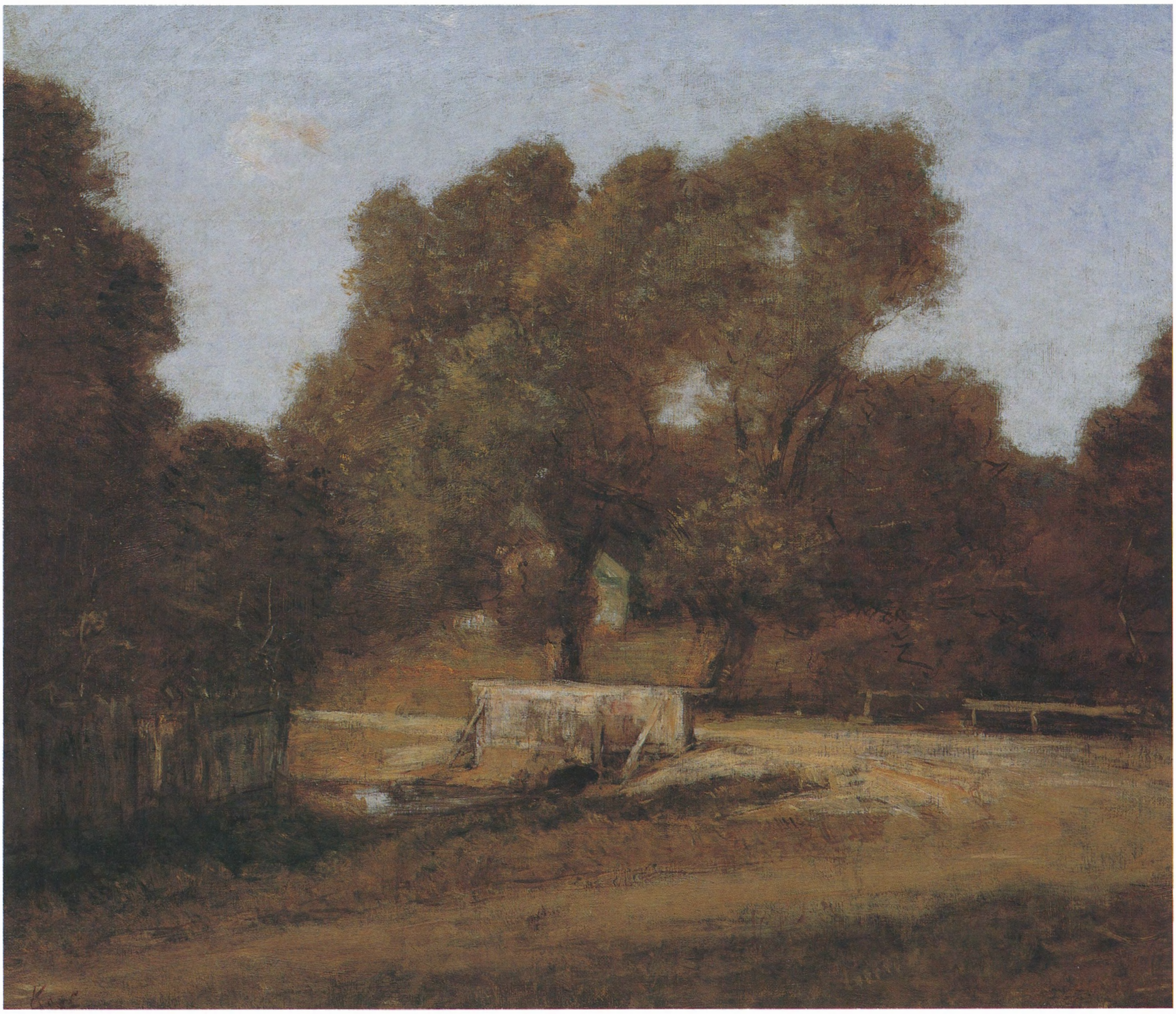


Fig. 7.44.1. Frederick W. Kost, *Summer Shadows*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in. Private collection.

and his cattle ranch that Roosevelt returned for succor, not for respite and mourning alone, but to hunt grizzlies and pursue cattle and horse rustlers.

For many, if not most of the religiously-minded, the theory of evolution did not necessarily contradict Christian revelation, nor pose an existential threat. Thoreau and Darwin were the last of a breed of semi-professional naturalists motivated to explore nature's secrets as much for aesthetic as for scientific reasons. They dissected nature, not to kill it, but to reveal its inherent life force, the heart of metamorphosis, which La Farge (echoing Thoreau's spiritual-material confluence) felt was an essential part of Buddhist transcendence: "Changes and transformations are only a 'play' of cause and effect, since spirit and matter are one in absolute nature, which in its essence can neither be born nor be dissolved."[178] Joy was at the center of this joint enterprise. As a twenty-first-century defender of Darwin's "nontheistic enchantment" of nature observed, "Darwin, whatever else, and with all his pains, illnesses, losses, loved the earth and the natural world he gave his life to describing; he found value and meaning in it; he argued that the human sense of value, which he regarded as the world's highest achievement, grew out of the earth earthy, and this genealogy, he believed, did not degrade but ennobled."[179]

This description of Darwin could just as easily apply to Thoreau, certainly to his portrayal of a benevolent nature.[180] With Darwin and Thoreau modifying each other in concert, the theory of evolution in late-Victorian thinking ennobled the mind and God's creations. Among the cultured classes in 1900, Darwinism was more of a blessing than a curse, a tantalizing elucidation and confirmation of what Emerson and Thoreau had long preached among the faithful. Their ideas infused liberal or mainline Protestantism (the Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians) with a progressive-reformist spirituality. Tonalist artists and their patrons certainly did not regard Darwinism as a mortal threat to ideas of divine providence, nor did they rule out the possibility that nature contained a divine essence, a constituent, perhaps, of Inness's unseen and Darwin's hidden adaptations. The popularity of Thoreau's writings among artists, in particular, and the literate public in general, was likely the result of the congeniality of his narrative style and concrete metaphors, and an approach that tended to subsume both Emerson's idealism and Darwin's material-scientific stance. Thoreau's perspective was simple and even moralistic: nature was a path to higher things, and higher things could mean almost anything, especially for social Darwinians who took comfort in being at the top of the food chain.

For scientists, philosophers, and the literate public, Darwin could be reconciled in myriad ways, mostly by selecting his ideas and modifying them to suit prevailing notions, in the way Herbert Spencer developed his social Darwinism and ideas of the survival of the fittest. Historian Louis Menand has described this process of reconciliation and the way in which Darwinian ideas were modified and integrated into both traditional and progressive modes of thinking after the devastation of the Civil War. He writes that Henry Adams "had, as a young man, regarded the theory of natural selection as unproved, and probably unprovable, but had accepted it anyway. Two of the most striking things about the reception of Darwin's theory are the degree to which it was regarded, even by its supporters, as highly speculative, and the speed with which it was nevertheless assimilated by younger intellectuals. 'One could not stop to chase doubts as though they were rabbits,' as Adams explained. 'One had no time to paint the surface of Law, even though it were cracked and rotten. For the young men whose lives were cast in the generation between 1867 and 1900, Law should be Evolution.' Darwinism dropped into a cultural configuration already aligned to accommodate it. Its fitness was generally appreciated before its rightness was generally established."[181] Much of the emotional ground for Darwin had been prepared by Emerson and Thoreau: Emerson had provided a Hegelian and Kantian idealistic underpinning (a single law governing the universe); Thoreau, a stoic acceptance of nature's laws—both material and spiritual, the bounty and goodness of the human lot even in face of ultimate death. Instead of a purposeless struggle, many could still find, through Thoreau's eyes, the fragmented remnant of a beneficent God—perhaps working His will through evolution—whose goodness was reflected in nature. Such near-pantheism found its way into the popular writings of Khalil Gibran, who in tribute to Albert Pinkham Ryder wrote, "Thine is the Giant-World of primal truth and unveiled visions, whose days stand in awe of mystic nights, whose nights are big with high and lustrous days, whose hills relate the unrecorded deeds of unremembered races, whose seas chant the deep melody of distant Time, whose sky withholds the secrets of unnamed gods."[182]

For Henry Adams, like so many in his generation struck either by the toll of war or personal loss, before the miracle of modern medicine greatly reduced random fatalities, it was the horror of death that confirmed him as a Darwinian. In an uncanny reprise of Thoreau's experience with the death of his brother John, Adams had presided at the bedside of his sister who succumbed to tetanus. Thoreau almost died of the emotional shock; for Adams, it changed everything. "The last lesson—the sum and term of education—began then... He had never seen Nature—only her surface—the sugar-coating that she shows to youth. Flung suddenly in his face, with the harsh brutality of chance, the terror of the blow stayed by him thenceforth for life... more than he could call on himself to bear. He found his sister, a woman of forty, as gay and brilliant in the terrors of lockjaw as she had been in the careless fun of 1859, lying in bed in consequence of a miserable cab-accident that had bruised her foot. Hour by hour the muscles grew rigid, while the mind remained bright, until after ten days of fiendish torture she died in convulsions. One had heard and read a great deal about death, and even seen a little of it, and knew by heart the thousand commonplaces of religion and poetry which seemed to deaden one's senses and veil the horror. Society being immortal, could put on immortality at will. Adams being mortal, felt only the mortality. Death took features altogether new to him... Nature enjoyed it, played with it, the horror added to her charm, she liked the torture, and smothered her victim with caresses... Nature had gone on sobering men and women with the same air of sensual pleasure... The first serious consciousness of Nature's gesture—her attitude towards life—took form then as a phantasm, a nightmare, an insanity of force."[183] The experience of his sister's death banished the possibility of a personal God from Adams's life: the very horror, frustration, and depression reprised in a million variations in the aftermath of the Civil War. And when his wife died of poisoning by her own hand years later—an event he did not mention in his autobiography—Adams had a close friend, the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens, create a bronze monument of a meditative figure, an androgynous hooded watcher seated along a path in Washington's Rock Creek Cemetery (fig. 7.45). Adams found Saint-Gaudens's transcendent Buddhist figure spellbinding and comforting, as have generations of gazers who have looked upon the impassive, imperturbable face, precisely because it offered only uncertainty, or at least no easy answers to the sad fate of the woman memorialized. "Naturally every detail interested him; every line; every touch of the artist; every change of light and shade; every point of relation; every possible doubt of Saint-Gaudens's correctness of taste or feeling; so that, as the spring approached, he was apt to stop there often to see what the figure had to tell him that was new; but, in all that it had to say, he never thought of questioning what it meant... The interest in the figure was not in its meaning, but in the response of the observer... Like all great artists, Saint-Gaudens held up the mirror and no more.

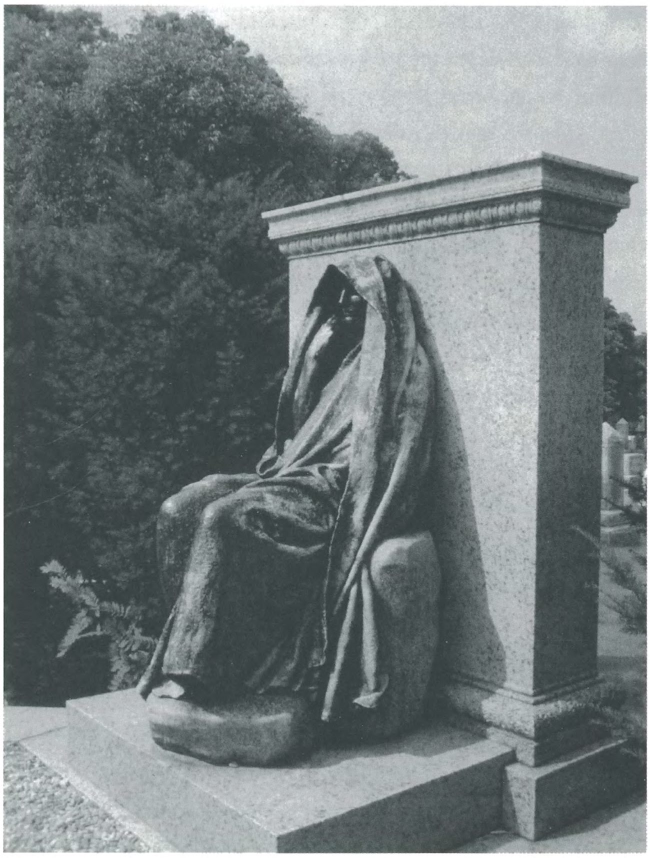


Fig. 7.45. Adams Memorial, Rock Creek Cemetery, Washington, D.C., by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, 1890–91. Library of Congress.

The American layman had lost sight of ideals; the American priest had lost sight of faith."[184]

Saint-Gaudens would echo these thoughts in the late 1890s: "Reasoning from one thing to the other and about the hopelessness of trying to fathom what it all means, I reached this: that we know nothing... But a deep conviction came over me like a flash that at the bottom of it all, whatever it is, the mystery must be beneficent... After all, we are like lots of microscopical microbes on this infinitesimal ball in space... I suppose that every earnest effort toward great sincerity or honesty or beauty in one's production is a drop added to the ocean of evolution, to the Something higher that... we are rising slowly (d_d slowly) to... The principle thought in my life is that we are on a planet going no one knows where, probably to something higher (on the Darwinian principle of evolution); that whatever it is, the passage is terribly sad and tragic, and to bear up at times against what seems to be the Great Power that is over us, the practice of love, charity, and courage are the great things."[185]

Art throughout the ages has provided consolation in the face of death. For the postwar generation of the 1870s and the decades following, the Tonalist landscape may well have played an increasingly significant, if silent and deeply personal, role in the grieving process. All eras have to bear their peculiar and cruel tragedies, but the confluence of the shock of fraternal bloodletting and the development of a comfortable middle-class culture, which was, nevertheless, far from immune to the scourge of disease and sudden death, may well have marked the late-Victorian world in ways unappreciated by later generations. We fundamentally inhabit their world of creature comforts; but before antibiotics, vaccines, and modern medical practices, their lives were far more precarious: death blotted out the young and healthy in unpredictable and harrowing numbers. For William Gilder, editor of *Scribner's Magazine* and *The Century Magazine*, and his wife, Helena de Kay Gilder, the loss of a young child to scarlet fever never left them. William Gilder put his feelings into his poetry and his work, while Helena put hers into her art. Gilder had fought in the Civil War as young man; his father, a minister, had died of smallpox in the war. His career as an editor and citizen was devoted to progressive causes, whether promoting Inness and Ryder, Emerson and Thoreau, and eventually Darwin, in his publications, or tenement reform in New York City. Gilder, like President Roosevelt (whose mother died of typhoid fever and his wife of Bright's disease, a kidney ailment—on the same day) and President Cleveland (who had cancer surgery while in office), and so many in their generation shadowed by the specter of the Civil War and arbitrary death by disease and infection, seem almost to have been driven to make the world a better place by seeking out both spiritual enlightenment and instituting concrete reforms in the political and civic sphere.

Something of the role of Tonalist art in this age can be inferred from the reaction of Thomas B. Clarke, Inness's agent and collector. In a letter to George Inness Jr., Clarke wrote of the way in which a painting by Inness had consoled him on the death of his son. "In the grief that was almost too heavy to bear I wandered about the house like a lost soul. I was inconsolable. I happened to glance up at a little Inness which I owned and always loved, 'A Gray Lowery Day' [see fig. 2.14], and like a burst of life your father's message of hope and eternity came over me. He spoke through that little canvas, and my soul understood what my mind had not. It was the only thing that could console me."[186]

Even scientists and thinkers like William James (fig. 7.46) hedged their bets throughout their lives, trying to reconcile Darwin, if not with Christianity, at least with some higher Emersonian spirituality, endeavoring to accommodate a worldview that retained a penumbral boundary of mystical rapture that science or logic could never quite penetrate. James, to his dying day, was fascinated with Spiritualists, even asking his brother Henry James to remain in Cambridge after his funeral, in case he might communicate with him from the other side. Instead of accepting the law of the survival of the fittest, William James described in his book *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) an evolutionary ascent that had produced humans able to make choices. In Menand's description, "There is intelligence in the universe: it is ours. It was our good luck that, somewhere

Fig. 7.46. William James, undated photograph.

along the way, we acquired minds. They released us from the prison of biology."[187] Many scientists adopted a Lamarckian view that put God in charge of evolution, a congenial pantheism that appealed to many. Following Emerson's lead, Unitarian Transcendentalists like the theologian William Ellery Channing, along with the reformed Calvinist Henry Ward Beecher, opted for a religion of feeling that placed human beings at the pinnacle of creation, even a nature ruled by the law of the jungle rather than the felicities of Walden Pond. Nature was inherently good, humankind perfectible, and evil an issue that was better finessed than agonized over.

William James's common-sense philosophy, which he called Pragmatism, was yet another way to accommodate the friction of traditional faith and science in an age he considered overly materialist. By incorporating aspects of Darwinism into his philosophy, he was able to paper over the fault lines of his age. James suggested that innate ideas—humans' intuitive idealism—are simply another category of variations produced by natural selection and are somehow useful for our survival. Thus belief itself is good and useful if it helps us to adapt to changing circumstances. Causation—the idea the divine plays a role in our lives—is another useful belief because it justifies the notion of a world that works for us. As James asserted in his lectures on Pragmatism, "All our thoughts are *instrumental*, and mental modes of *adaptation* to reality, rather than revelations or Gnostic answers to some divinely instituted world-enigma."[188]

James, like Marcel Proust, probably came as close as anyone in his generation of thinkers to detecting the sources of our deepest and most enduring responses to nature. Proust, who modeled a key character in *Remembrance of Things Past*, the artist Elstir, on Alexander Harrison and Whistler, with perhaps elements of Tonalists like Turner, Monet, and Vuillard, sought to express in his descriptions of nature, and the paintings of Elstir, the wonders of the innocent eye—an eye unencumbered by the philosophical categories that prevent a true visualization of the fluid and metamorphic impressions of nature. As noted previously, such a return to a pre-literate language of observation, in which the perceiver and perceived enjoy a reciprocal give and take, informed many of the stylistic innovations of the Tonalist movement. This probing for primitive emotion was key to modernism's development and would be reprised in the writings of Freud and Jung, and inthe art of Kandinsky, Picasso, and Rothko, among many others.

Proust visualized such primitive drives in terms of individual memory and, drawing on Emerson and Ruskin, a more poetic extrapolation of the lost metaphors of time and innocence: "[Elstir] had extracted, by painting them on various rectangles of canvas that were placed at all angles, here a sea wave angrily crashing its lilac foam on the sand, there a young man in white linen leaning on the rail of a ship. The young man's jacket and the splashing wave had acquired a new dignity from the fact that they continued to exist, even though they were derived of those qualities in which they might be supposed to consist, the wave being no longer able to wet and or the jacket to clothe anyone ... If God the Father had created things by naming them, it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which designate things correspond inevitably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping with that notion."[189] Tonalism, by rediscovering "our true impressions," provided the most visceral embodiment of this idea of the way in which we actually visualize the known and unknown. Tonalist artists, like Proust in the literary sphere, revolutionized art by reconnecting the underground narrative of our lives with its sources in the bedrock of individual experience, and thus the sensibilities adapted for survival over time out of mind. Something of this ancient lineage is caught in the reflections of William James in an essay of 1895, *Is Life Worth Living?* "The deepest thing in our nature is this *Binnenleben* [hidden life, hidden self] ... this dumb region of the heart in which we dwell alone with our willingness and unwillingness, our faiths and fears. As through the cracks and crannies of caverns those waters exude from the earth's bosom which then form the fountain-heads of springs, so in these crepuscular depths of personality the sources of all our outer deeds and decisions take their rise. Here is our deepest organ of communication with the nature of things."[190]

Such a conservative revolution, rooted in the past—"liberal" in its nineteenth-century meaning of practical adaptations based on experience—was perfectly rendered in Henry James's vision of Pragmatism. This philosophy flourished

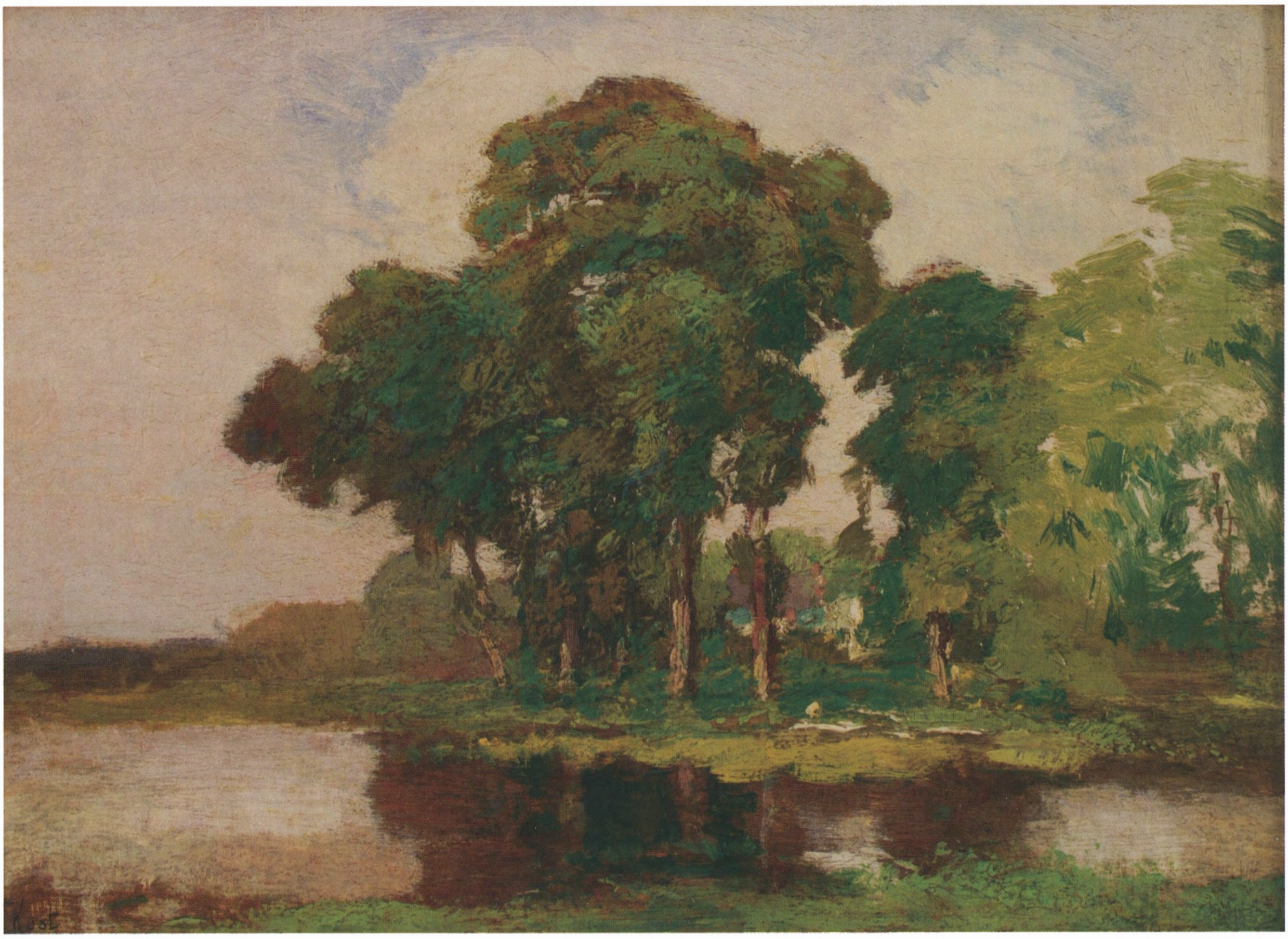


Fig. 7.47. Frederick W. Kost, *Summer Green*, c. 1910. Oil on panel, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

between 1898 and 1917, the heyday of Tonalism, providing a generation with a framework, if not a justification, to pursue its individual goals with the courage of its convictions in a time of bewildering choices and counter currents, not to mention conformist attitudes. Louis Menand has commented, "Everything James and Dewey (the philosopher John Dewey) wrote as pragmatists boils down to a single claim: people are the agents of their own destinies."[191] Above all things, this Civil War generation believed in tolerance of viewpoints, not just between conflicting faiths—the old and the new, tradition and progress—but how people fundamentally saw the world operating. Such a tolerant attitude took its bearings from everyday practicalities, a common-sense skepticism of ideologies, because hard-and-fast ideologies, so James and his contemporaries believed, had lain behind the slaughter of the Civil War. In the field of art, Tonalism brokered a delicate if elusive compromise—a compromise that was as effective as it was elusive. By unleashing the creative drives of the individual to the benefit of the general culture, Tonalism did much to refine and revitalize the zeitgeist of the day with meaningful symbols, which in turn helped speed the healing of a shattered nation. Undoubtedly, much of this healing, by necessity, took place in the private sphere. Although large pictures had come into fashion after 1900, small works like Frederick W. Kost's *Summer Green*, circa 1910 (fig. 7.47), provided solace and comfort, within manageable dimensions, as apartment living came increasingly into vogue in the years before World War I.

The failures of Reconstruction to enforce democratic and social equality in the South, if need be, by force of arms, was an effect of the emotional exhaustion of the war years and its aftermath. From the presidency of Grant forward, no one had the stomach to impose martial law or seek solutions by again resorting to violence. The reactions against the Spanish-American War and the American entrance into World War I were the result of the lingering trauma of the Civil War carnage. For many, such perceived failures to enforce a more just society by the imposition of federal authority, as well as the bloodletting when troops were brought in to quell labor agitation, only increased this retreat into the private life, the traditional domain of individual and incremental change, and brought a focus on the creative energies of the few great spirits like George Inness. Teddy Roosevelt may have successfully invoked Darwinian ideas of the survival of the fittest, and the white man's burden in support of intervention in Cuba and later World War I, but Inness, who had had his fill of war by 1865, invoked a less brutal anti-Darwinian argument for the sanctity of art: "The artist reproduces nature not as the brute sees it, but as an idea partaking more or less of the creative source from which it flows...The divine life in man is in the harmony of the interior forces of the soul; the aesthetic life is in the harmony of the exterior forces of the soul... Let us believe in art, not as something to gratify curiosity or suit commercial ends, but as something to be loved and cherished because it is the handmaid of the spiritual life of the age."[192]

Tonalism's neutrality in the turn-of-the-century culture wars, as well as its ability to adapt and reflect a diversity of conflicting views and interpretations, made it a thoroughly American phenomenon and integral to a polyglot melting-pot culture. Its mystical reenchantment of nature, embracing both Darwin and Thoreau with a patina of Emersonian uplift, was a synthetic achievement of no small moment. Aesthetics mattered. Hearth and home, books and art, poetic insights and reconciliation with the loss of loved ones, and the quiet solitude of the country retreat were central to the emotional life of a tumultuous era. For the postwar generation living in the shadow of Spencer's competitive struggle for survival—and the killing grounds of recent memory, which in Henry Adams's mind substantiated Darwin—the aestheticization of nature was a way of reclaiming man's rightful place in the world. Art epitomized humankind's highest aspirations and a beckoning path of welcome, not danger. As William James's Pragmatism might have it, recreating nature in the mind's eye, or in the artist's hand, was a supreme triumph of adaptation, even if only in a standoff with death. Art and wildness offered the consolations of an escape into a better and more forgiving realm.

William and Henry James: The Mystical Other World and the Felicities of the Lampless Hour

In 1880, Charles de Kay penned the poem "Surrender," which in part reads: "There lies a bliss just in the lion's jaws/Ere yet his fangs crush to the very bone,/The while his dread broad soft unswerving paws/Rest on a victim without cry or moan,/ But keenly wakeful to his great warm mouth/His yellow eyes, lovely, yet void of routh,... /There's a strange luxury in being undone/Crushed flat, brayed fine, wiped out and all destroyed,/A mighty joy to meet that glorious one/Whose power is boundless as the unsound void,..."[193] The terrible joy of surrender to both the creative and destructive forces in nature that the author espoused was hardly uncommon in de Kay's generation, whether intimated in Charles Darwin's glorious—or unsettling—revelation that bonded mankind to nature, or Spencer's more alarming struggle of the fittest, or the very real horrors of typhoid, scarlet fever, and tetanus, or gruesome death on the battlefield. For the first generation to fully inhabit the Darwinian universe, which struggled to accommodate humanity's new place in the hierarchy of nature, Tonalism offered a mediating perspective. It did so by encompassing the public and private spheres, offering icons of devotion in which both the sorrows and joys of life were mirrored.

As a critic and poet, Charles de Kay had insisted that a great national art must reflect the range of life's trials and pleasures. De Kay's father had been a brilliant commander in Argentina's navy, and his older brothers, Joseph and Sidney, had both fought bravely in the Civil War. Joseph de Kay was badly wounded in the Wilderness Campaign of 1864 and the injuries he sustained so undermined his health that he died young, at age fifty; Sidney de Kay enlisted as a private and fought in many campaigns, his gallantry under fire saw him rise to the rank of major, and he subsequently fought the Turks in Crete where he was badly wounded. Born in 1848, Charles de Kay had been too young to fight in the Civil War, but one suspects that the experience of his brothers and others of his generation was responsible for the sometimes icy realism in what a period critic described as the impassioned and subjective moods of his poetry.[194] The grandson of a poet and naval architect, son of an admiral, brother of wounded war heroes, de Kay was unsentimental and no-nonsense in his demand for a landscape art that contained everything life offered, and denied, an attitude that was marked by a Darwinian surrender to both the splendor and the pain of the universe.

William James, too, found himself buffeted by the grandeur of a universe that could cut every which way. A onetime artist and the avatar of modern psychology, he was beset by depression and doubt all his life, and probably guilt for not fighting in the Civil War. Two of his brothers fought in the war and one, Willy, was badly wounded and died young from various complications. His sister, Alice, was a melancholic depressive, who also died young. James was drawn to the outdoor life, buying a house in New Hampshire and later injuring his heart on a long trek in the Adirondacks. Throughout his writings, he advocated long walks in the outdoors—reconnecting with nature (a quintessentially Emersonian quest) as key to health and survival. James's major insights into psychology, beginning with his *Principles of Psychology* of 1890, originated in his professional experience of the healthy and unhealthy pathologies of everyday life. The *Principles* helped develop in the educated public a deep respect for the mind in all its complexity and wonder. James promoted an understanding of the mind that stressed the inextricable aggregate of reason and emotion, the essential role of instinct, and the role of mystical and transitory experience in the moments of consciousness that make up our mental universe. In effect, James, just as Thoreau had done in a wider arena, resolved Emerson's materialist-idealist dilemma by tracing, or grounding, all the feelings that animate the soul to sources in the body, and thus in nature.

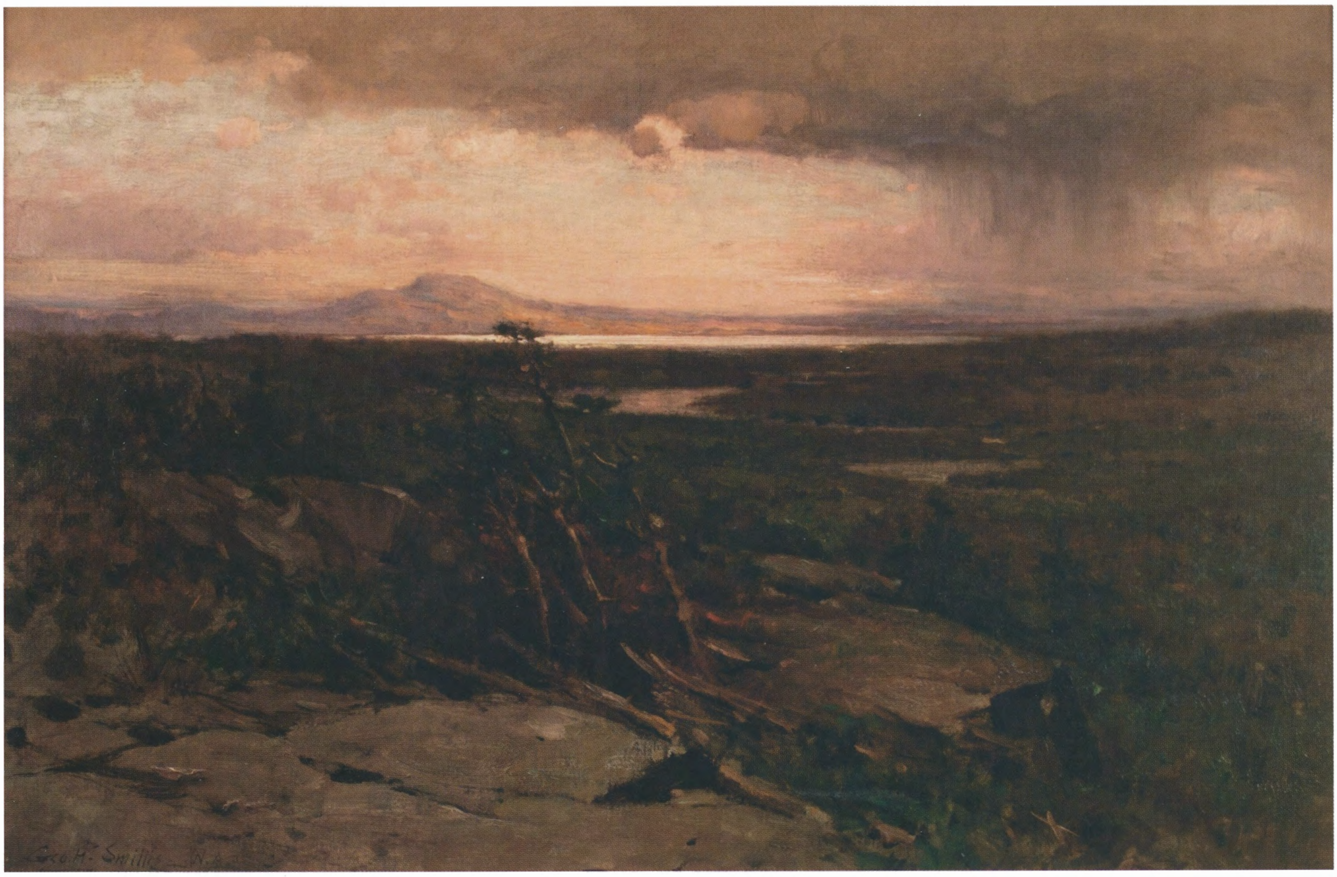


Fig. 7.48. George Smillie, *A Reminiscence of the North Woods*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Private collection.

Walt Whitman had earlier intimated similar ideas in his "body electric," in which body and mind were inseparable; the poet could not conceive of the separation of body and soul. In his earliest notebooks he had written, "I am the poet of the body/And I am the poet of the soul."[195] These alternating currents of sensation between the physical and spiritual animate almost all of Whitman's poetry, whether the spring prairie grasses bursting noiselessly upward from winter's sleep, or the hand that reaches to touch the glorious green. "The resurrection of the wheat appears with pale visage out of its graves..."[196] Whitman's making of poetry out of the material facts of life, exalting them, eliciting their spiritual value through the prism of human consciousness, was another validation of Emerson and Thoreau's insights. Darwin's embedded sense of metamorphosis, of death bringing forth new life, of species passing away and new ones emerging, only heightened this awareness of the transitoriness of all things for the post–Civil War generation. As the suffering of the Civil War caused Whitman to rewrite parts of his *Leaves of Grass*, so the American people found ways to accommodate the horror of that conflict by embracing an art at once somber yet suggestive of uplift and hope. George Smillie's *A Reminiscence of the North Woods*, circa 1900 (fig. 7.48), is but one of many expressions of this yearning to recapture a youthful ardor, here embodied in memories of a yet unspoiled wilderness.

Whitman's sense of the ineffable holiness and harmony in all things certainly animated the art of the Tonalists, while James's principles of psychology mapped an uncanny corollary to the emotional underpinnings of Tonalist aesthetics. For a work of science, James's *Principles* was fundamentally literary in tone, or as the writer Rebecca West commented in 1916: "[O]ne of the James brothers grew up to write fiction as though it were philosophy, and the other to write philosophy as though it were fiction."[197] Both William and Henry James had studied art with William Morris Hunt, and William seriously considered a career in art; he was a very fine draftsman. In many respects, Henry James, especially in his late fiction, parallels the modernist direction of Whistler and the Tonalists in his growing subjectivity and reliance on atmospheric, emotional landscapes to map out (show rather than tell) the mindscapes of his characters, replete with all their contradictions and uncertainties; or, as Gertrude Stein once said of Henry James, "You see, he made it sort of like an atmosphere, and it was not the realism of the characters but the realism of the composition which was the important thing."[198] Stein viewed James as the precursor of twentieth-century modernism in literature because he required the reader to participate in constructing the reality of the text by choosing the many contradictory interpretations of events or characterizations offered. As Emerson, Thoreau, and the Romantics had promoted humankind's sovereign and subjective eye over nature, so Henry James and the Tonalists offered a palimpsest of feelings—hazy, indistinct, and haunting, which each observer could interpret in his own way. In this context, Inness's depiction of the unseen, the immaterial, otherworldly reality intuited in the artist's painting, seems to reflect less a Swedenborgian disposition and more a mystical wanderlust that was characteristic of the age. As a recent commentator has written about Henry James: "He was the first writer to deprive the reader of the illusion that language directly reflects reality. In his novels, words are vague symbols that require careful interpretation. As a result, the meaning of every one of his sentences emerges not from the text alone, but from the interaction of the subjective reader and the unknowable work. A perfect truth or final reading always eludes our grasp, for reality, Henry wrote, 'has not one window but a million ... At each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes.'"[199] Henry James's analogy suggests a gallery in which a group stands before a painting, each observer absorbed in private reverie. It is no coincidence that Henry James (fig. 7.49) was a sympathetic and insightful reviewer of Tonalist art and that his insights into the ambiguities of pictorial space spilled over into the imaginative worlds of his fiction.

This is nowhere more apparent than in James's ghost stories, the most famous being *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) and *The Jolly Corner* (1908), both of which touched on the mystical apprehensions that tantalized the minds of the writer's contemporaries. In *The Jolly Corner*, James's protagonist is a returning expatriate who discovers the ghost of his alter ego, the person he might have been had he remained in New York, in the old family home near Union Square. Stalking the ghost of himself, "the moments he liked best were those of gathering dusk, of the short autumn twilight; this was the time of which, again and again, he found himself hoping most. Then he could, as seemed to him, most intimately wander and wait, linger and listen, feel his fine attention, never in his life before so fine, on the pulse of the great vague place: he preferred the lampless hour and only wished he might have prolonged each day the deep crepuscular spell."[200]

James's crepuscular spell is writ large throughout the precincts of Tonalism, as is the mystical realm his character enters, so putting his fictional self in touch with his alter ego, his earlier self, his past and his memories of childhood. "The effect [the sound of a cane on a marble floor] was the dim reverberating tinkle as of some far-off bell hung who should say where?—in the depths of the house, of the past, of that mystical other world that might have flourished for him had he not, for weal or woe, abandoned it. On this impression ... feeling the place once more in the likeness of some great glass bowl, all precious concave crystal, set delicately humming by the play of a moist finger round its edge. The concave crystal held, as it were, this mystical other world, and the indescribably fine murmur of its rim was the sigh there, the scarce audible pathetic wail to his strained ear, of all the old baffled forsworn possibilities."[201]

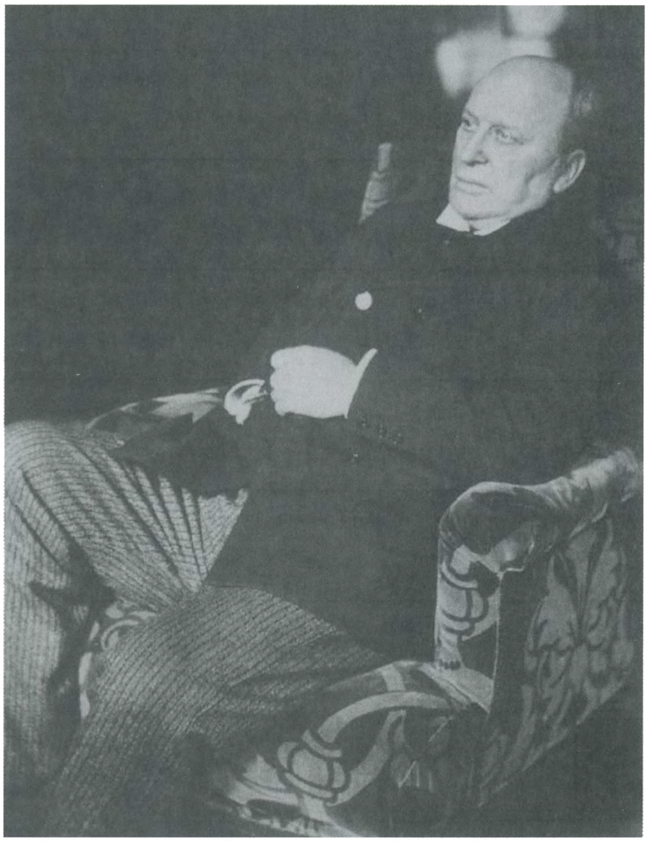


Fig. 7.49. Henry James, photographed c. 1905, in the library of Lamb House, his home at Rye, England.

James's "mystical other world," brought to view in solitude (when his character had "let himself go") at dusk, "the lampless hour," when the mind is most attuned to the "delicately humming" silence, is precisely the emotional, near trancelike state Tonalist artists sought to induce. For James's protagonist and alter ego, who had abandoned the Spencerian economic struggles of modern New York—the "bignesses" of its skyscrapers—for a more genteel existence in the Old World, the mystical past of memory, existing outside of time, constantly beckoned the seasoned time-traveler. The Proustian embrace of memory and past time, not unlike the contemplation of a Tonalist painting, held out the possibility of escape into a changing but changeless retreat, a Darwinian state of nature with all of its pleasures and few of its pains.

This seamless interaction of the inner and outer man moving freely across the spiritual-material divide, first explored in Thoreau's writings, had even found technical expression—or scientific explanation—in the work of Henry James's brother. William James coined such phrases as "stream of consciousness," (often used in reference to Henry James's novels), and "one great blooming, buzzing confusion," to describe the interior world of human thought processes. William James took Emersonian ideas of self-reliance and independence and the capacity for subjective thought of the human mind—a mind vitalized by its immersion in nature—and gave them a gloss of scientific respectability. He touted the energizing interior muscle of the will to contest with life on its own terms. The mind was heroic in its eternal battle with the sinister and dreadful. This, for James, was the key triumph of the human spirit. "He can still find a zest in it, not by 'ostrich-like forgetfulness,' but by a pure inward willingness to take the world with those deterrent objects there."[202] James thus championed the subjective will in its ceaseless struggle to grapple with the world as it is, and, if necessary, remake the world in its own image. Free will informs religion and art and every hour of the day: "What wonder that these dumb responses should seem our deepest organs of communication with the nature of things! What wonder if the effort demanded by them be the measure of our worth as men! What wonder if the amount which we accord of it be the one strictly underived and original contribution which we make to the world."[203] This subjective imperative galvanized an entire generation of Tonalist artists. Again, Thoreau's twilit realm, in which the spiritual and material merge (intuited in the lost-edge technique of the Tonalist) is posited by James as the source—and hope—of our common humanity.

It is little wonder then, that in 1902, when James wrote his seminal work, *The Variety of Religious Experience*, the mystical experience should form the centerpiece of his understanding of religion, if not the dynamo of life itself. Mysticism, for James, was ineffable and directly experienced, a state of deep knowledge, both transitory and sometimes overwhelming, as if the participant was merged with a superior power. James compared the experience of mystical rapture with that of lyric poetry and music. Crucially, James promoted the value of feeling to his generation as a kind of aesthetics of feeling: "[R]eligious feeling is thus an absolute addition to the subject's range of life. It gives him a new sphere of power. When the outward battle is lost and the outer world disowns him, it redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste."[204] This culture of practical religiosity and high feeling—staring death in the face, of sentiment rather than sentimentality—that James promoted and codified, prompted critics like Charles de Kay to demand that American art express individual emotion above all else.

Darwin and Spencer: Tonalism and the Unseen Spirit Life in Nature

For any landscape has a soul as well as a body. Its body is our great rock-ribbed mother-earth with her endless expanse of fields and hills, of rivers and surging seas. Its soul is th spirit of light—of sunlight, of starlight—which plays ceaselessly across the face of the landscape, veiling it at night in mystery and shadow, painting it at dawn with the colors of the pearl-shell, and bathing it at mid-day in a luminous glory. To this and to the ambient and all-enveloping atmosphere, with its clouds and its mists, its rains and its veiling haze, are due the infinite and everlasting shifting moods of nature. He who paints the body alone may be an excellent craftsman, but the true artist is he who paints the beautiful body informed and irradiated by the still more lovely and fascinating spirit—he who renders the mood.

—Birge Harrison (see *Silence*, p. 428)[205]

The Tonalist artist, by an imaginative reshaping of the landscape—endowing it with sould by eliciting "the spirit of light," reassembling it with color, form, and vibrant tonalities, and imbuing it with his gestural touch, was reclaiming man's place at the top of the hierarchy of creation—a Darwinian, or certainly Spencerian imperative. Just as the massive destruction of the American wilderness was coming into widespread disrepute, so Tonalism portrayed nature in light of humankind's finest hopes and intentions. Darwin's descent of man was transformed into his ascent. The new celebrity status of Inness, Ryder, Blakelock, and Whistler—the reverence for the artist-seer—during this period reflects the growing, near-religious idolatry of art in the Gilded Age. The great collectors like Henry Clay Frick, Isabella Stuart Gardner, and Charles Lang Freer built shrines to this new idolatry, engaging in their own Darwinian struggle to buy up Europe's art treasures for America. In turn, their stately and intimate museums provided a sanctuary for their art (all bought Whistler), belying the fiercely competitive business culture that had provided the funds for collecting and building, as well as the aggressive if not rapacious methods of acquisition. Surely, for many contemplating the implications of evolution by natural selection in the last decades of the nineteenth century, before the mechanism of chance variation and genetic inheritance was fully known, the Tonalist landscape offered a respite from the battle of life, among myriad consolations.

From the 1930s and the Great Depression on, Tonalism has been tarred with the brush of elitism, that it was embraced by the upper classes as a signifier of rank and blue-blooded solidarity, an accoutrement of good breeding and good taste.[206] In fact, Tonalism in root and branch was a highly democratic art; its visual and therapeutic blessings were prompted from the grassroots, and subsequently spread far and wide through its offshoots in affordable watercolors, pastels, and prints, and by extension, the decorative arts. From the perspective of a century, Tonalism can now be understood to have played a key ameliorative role in the great transformation of American society in the decades after the Civil War, preserving a tentative compromise between forces of tradition and progress—a truce of almost a half-century's duration from 1878 to 1928, before the onset of fundamentalist evangelicalism on the right and

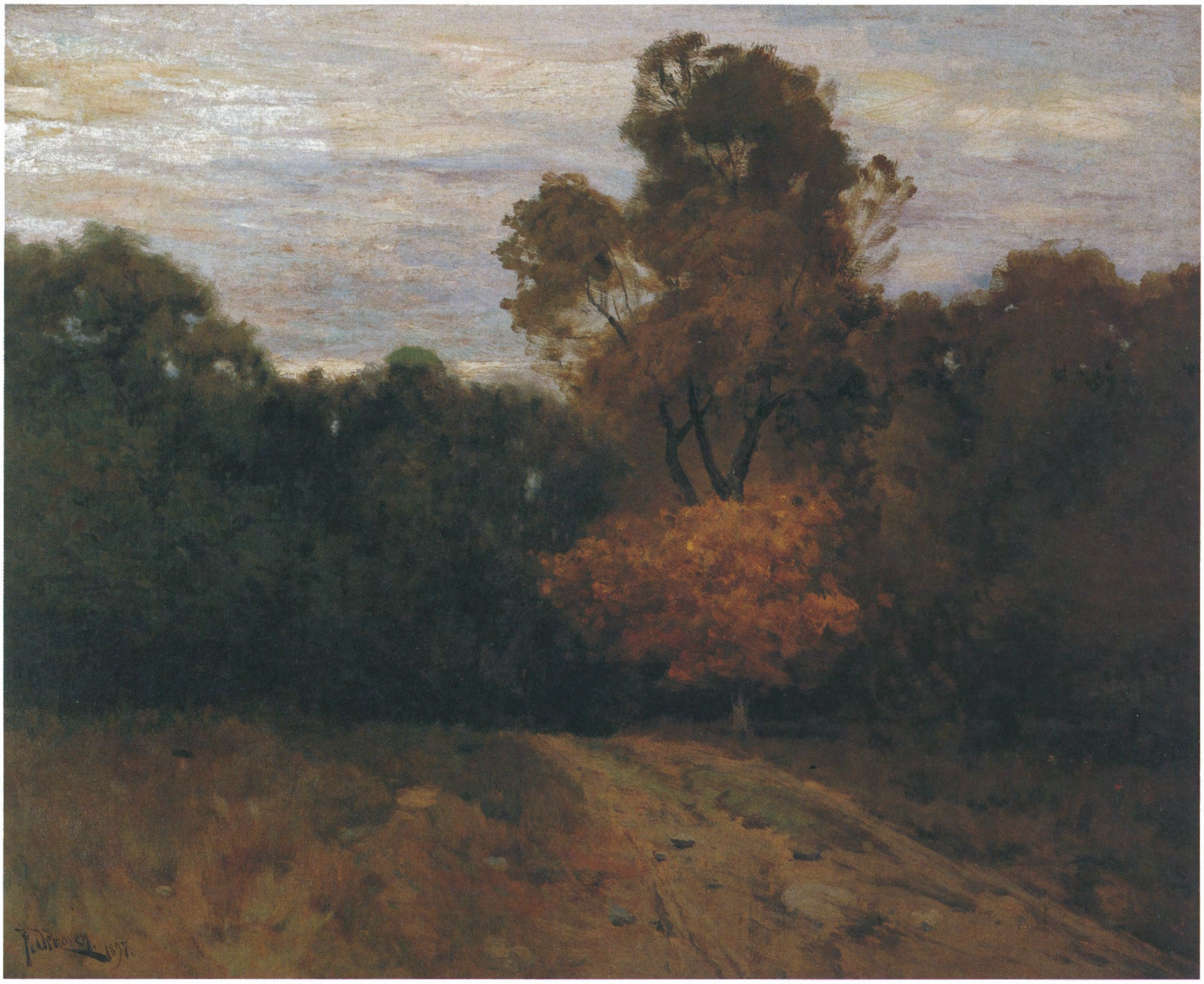

F. de Haven 1897.

Fig.7.49.1. Franklin de Haven, *Autumn Pasture,* 1897. Oil on canvas, 24 x 28 in. Private collection.

fascination with Marxism on the left soured the hard-won middle ground of liberal Protestantism.

By sheltering a diverse array of often conflicting beliefs under a compelling visual iconography, Tonalism provided solace for a troubled age. Thoreau's vision of wildness lay at the heart of the Tonalist enterprise. It was a wildness that Theodore Roosevelt, or John Muir or John Burroughs could readily embrace—along with the cougar and the grizzly—because wildness accommodated both the glory and hardship of a Darwinian worldview and folded it into a romantic American vision that directed the initiate to higher things. Tonalism was at one with the progressive impulse of the age, especially the reformist views of the charismatic Teddy Roosevelt, who embodied a dizzying hybrid of Thoreau-like love of nature, Emersonian self-reliance, self-invention, and nationalist fervor, and a raw Darwinian embrace of change—all the challenges the race of life might bring.

Thoreau, Emerson, and the Civil War prepared the ground for Darwin in America. Darwin's principle of natural selection was inherent in Thoreau's poetic vision of a nature that allowed for the merging of spirit and matter in a higher order of consciousness: a nature replete with galvanic change, cycles of life and death, patterns of dazzling relationships, and infinite shades of meaning that showered the beholder with beatitudes beyond number. The very act of perception and contemplation, at the core of Thoreau's gospel, became for many turn-of-the-century readers a boon of evolution—hadn't the development of civilization, as well as of the brain made it all possible? This *was* man's glory, his inextricable connection to the world that gave him life and gave life meaning. For the James brothers, John Adams, and La Farge, who found in Darwin Buddhist equivalents, Darwinism was less the hardened doctrine of twentieth-century biology and more a mellifluous intimation of underlying, perhaps unsettling forces, but no less majestic. It was the unseen spirit that had so attracted Inness and Emerson in another guise. Darwin's son wrote that his father's religion was rooted in nature and a profound passion for organic life, his "deep sense of the power of nature may be called in his case a religious feeling... he had no religious sentiment."[207] As a contemporary interpreter of Darwin has written, "There is a curious parallel between the power of religion to transcend the self, to absorb the self into a larger entity, and the power of Darwin's science, at least theoretically, to absorb the self into the natural world."[208]

Darwin remained in love with nature and language and with his journey of discovery, writing in the last lines of *The Origin of Species*: "[T]here is a grandeur in this view of things," a view echoed in the Tonalist landscape. Emerson's lush generalities, too, had prepared the way for Darwin. From the 1870s on, Emersonian ideas of the "over-soul," of an underlying unity in all things that banishes duality and plurality, and his Lamarckian understanding of development as a progression from lower to higher forms, began to merge in many minds with Darwinian ideas, especially as expressed in the writings of the British philosopher Herbert Spencer (fig. 7.50) and his American acolyte and popularizer John Fiske. Spencer's *System of Synthetic Philosophy, First Principles* (1862) sold more than a half-million copies in the decades after its publication. Spencer had no less a goal than the creation of a natural religion based on the revelations of Darwin, a religion of scientific truth that would buttress many of the understandings of traditional Protestant belief—recast in terms of an enlightened, progressive, and uplifting movement to higher and higher levels of civilization. This appealed greatly to post–Civil War America's practical and spiritual bent, as well as to views on the superiority of Anglo-American culture. Both traditionalists and the scientific-minded could find common ground in a hazy religious feeling that evolution provided the means for man's march to the uplands of cultural and intellectual dominion over creation. The historian Kathleen Pyne writes: "The transition from Emerson's cosmos—unified, harmonious, and ever in flux—to Spencer's fluid world of energy was effortless for Americans who favored religious pantheism. Spencer's nature, moving in a harmonious manner toward a higher, more complex form of life, plainly seemed to offer a welcome, scientifically confirmed version of Emerson's familiar world of unity-in-diversity. Thus did Emerson's over-soul find its late-nineteenth-century correspondence in Spencer's Unknowable, the supreme power or absolute existence that can be sensed in consciousness."[209]

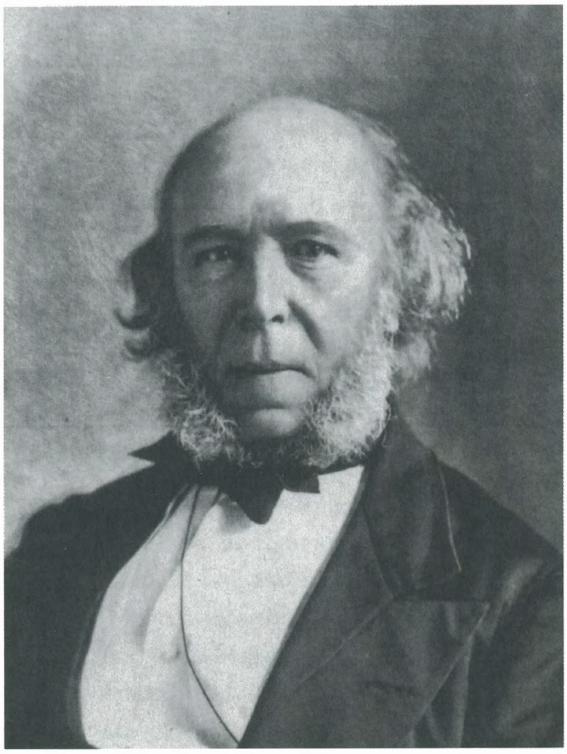


Fig. 7.50. Herbert Spencer, undated photograph.

Spencer's American interpreter John Fiske, an indefatigable writer and lecturer, adapted Spencer's ideas on evolution to fit American proclivities for a more spiritual understanding of the forces and energies of uplift flowing through nature—a power coursing through humankind, too, culminating in man's perfection as the greatest handiwork of God. Whatever the ultimate social, political, or religious implications of Fiske's ideas, his voluminous writings uncannily echo many of Emerson and Thoreau's thoughts in terms of extrapolating the evolutionary promise of force, energy, change, and metamorphosis in nature—the same unseen forces of change and changelessness that Inness felt all about him and tried to approximate in paint. Fiske's multi-volume *Cosmic Philosophy* (1874) is a smorgasbord of fact and speculation but it weaves a mystical, near-hypnotic spell in its rendition of the metamorphic energy pulsing through the known cosmos. Before the full rigors of the scientific method were applied to evolutionary theory, or before the deep complexities of genetics, natural variation, and selection were better understood, Fiske's concoctions provided a heady brew of naturalist philosophy, theology, and popular science read by millions of educated Americans. Fiske wrote: "It has been proved to follow from that axiom of the Persistence of Force upon which all physical science is based, that the mere coexistence of innumerable discrete bodies in the universe, exerting attractive and repulsive forces upon each other, necessitates a perpetual rhythmical redistribution of the Matter and Motion of which the phenomenal universe is composed. It has been proved that this eternal rhythm must of necessity be manifest in alternating eras both general and local, of Evolution and Dissolution,—eras in which now the concentration of Matter and dissipation of Motion, and now the diffusion of Matter and absorption of Motion, predominate,—eras which many be short, as in the duration of a snow-crystal or of a butterfly's life, or long, as in the duration of our planetary system. It has been proved that the process of Evolution, during which Matter is chiefly being lost, must, under certain assigned conditions, result in a continuous change from a state of homogeneity, indefiniteness, and incoherence to a stage of heterogeneity, definiteness, and coherence."[210]

Fiske saw in the workings of "Evolution" a "provisional answer to the time-honoured question of Philosophy—whence came we, what are we, and whither do we trend? ... The progress toward higher complexity and higher organization has likewise been discovered to be taking place in *process* as well as in *things*. It has been shown that Life is a process, consisting in a series of adjustments between the organism and its environment; and that Mind, objectively considered, is a special form of Life, consisting in a specialized portion of the series of adjustments. In these wondrous processes we have found the Law of Evolution most beautifully exemplified...."[211]

Fiske's very language—the constant echoing rhythm of his controlling images describing the energies that cycle between man and nature, past and present, microcosm and macrocosm, and the force field of metamorphosis, which unites and directs all processes and things, including the human mind—approximates the visual energy found in the pattern-fields of soft- and hard-edged forms and the vibration and refraction of colored light and contiguous tones in the Tonalist canvas. The neo-pagan imagination that informs so much of Fiske's metaphors—central, as has been seen, to the New England mind and literary culture—also did much to ease the absorption of Darwinian ideas on American shores. Fiske's grand view of nature as an all-encompassing and dynamic continuum in which the human mind acts both as an observer and participant has its roots in classical thought, in Virgil and the Stoics; it was a neo-pagan viewpoint shared by critics Charles de Kay, Frank Jewett Mather, John van Dyke, Sadakichi Hartmann, and Charles Caffin.

De Kay, like Emerson and Thoreau, saw the forces at work in nature—and art—as the ancient Greeks understood them: forces of renewal, reinvigoration, and purification. The historian Robert Richardson wrote of Darwin's influence on Thoreau: "Change, individuation, metamorphosis, transmigration of form—all these pointed towards growth itself, not the grown thing, as the great underlying reality in nature."[212] Charles de Kay, in his discussion of the art of the Tonalist Charles Melville Dewey, perfectly conveys Thoreau's Stoic understanding and Fiske's Darwinian wonder at the synergetic dynamo of nature: "Mr. Dewey is among those who most successfully convey the impression of wholeness in nature, of all parts working together toward a single impression, of a unity that is worlds away from simplicity, that contains multitudinous references to a still more multitudinous background of facts and experiences ... The large silhouette of the tree masses, the breadth of the nobly designed sky, the solidity of the earth, are elements of that sense of security in the working of eternal laws throughout the universe which the sight of wide horizons at still moments inspires."[213]

In language and paint, Fiske, de Kay, and Dewey portray the same neo-pagan Darwinian worldview, in which enchantment was everywhere, and everywhere to be found; where ideas, feelings, and visual impressions moved though a seamless spectrum of repeating natural cycles, of birth, decay, and death, which the eye discerns in every quivering leaf and blade of grass, or on the shifting planes of the distant horizon: the changeableness of everything. For the Tonalist artist, instead of a battlefield on which only the fittest survived, nature was transformed under his hand into a grandeur replete with added meaning, not less, while the enchantments described by Darwin—before Darwin became Darwinism—could gracefully elide into the enchantments of Thoreau's Walden Pond, haunted as it was by loss on every horizon. This was a Walden replete with "these wondrous processes" as described by John Fiske, in which humans and nature drew strength from the universal forces that cycle through and unite all things. The old body-soul, materialist-idealist dichotomies were, if not quite banished, certainly toned down. In Walt Whitman's terms, man *is* body and soul complete, all part of the same uplifting nature. This mystical oneness with nature lies at the heart of Tonalist landscape, a nature full of mystery and nostalgic enchantment, to which memory turns for succor at every bend in life's path. It is memory of youthful ardor, of a better time and place, as war veteran Oliver Wendell Holmes recalled in

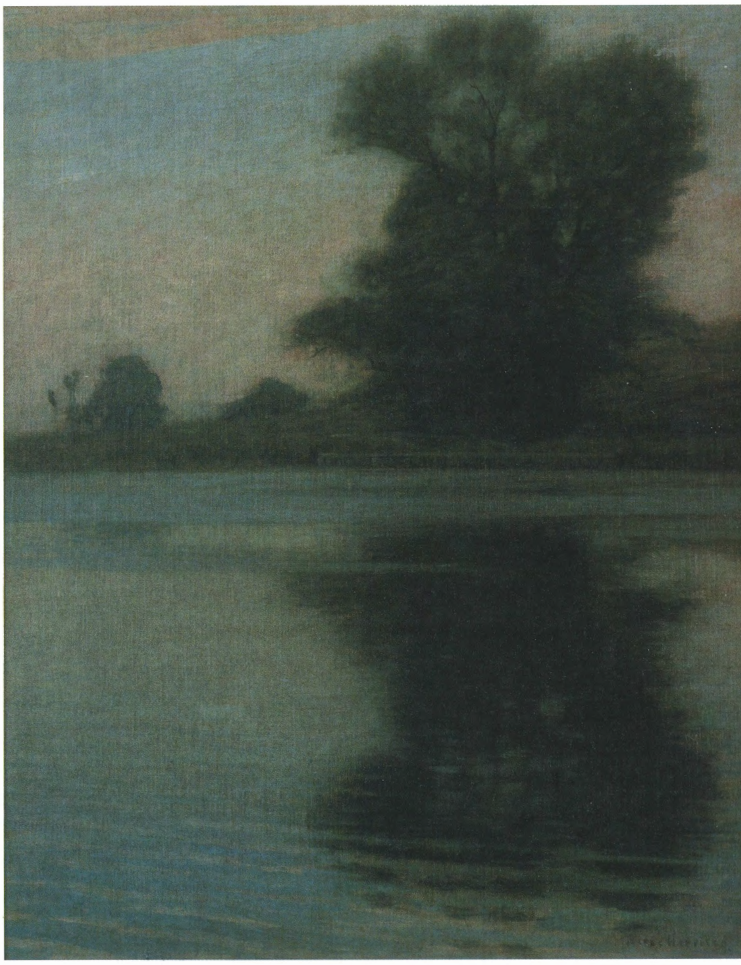


Fig. 7.50.1. Birge Harrison, *Silence,* c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in. Private collection.

old age, memorializing a fallen comrade: "Through our great good fortune in our youth our hearts were touched with fire."[214]

Darwin, with Thoreau and Emerson as pathfinders, had changed how Americans saw the world and how artists visualized it. As Americans had responded so forthrightly to Whistler decades before the English or French acknowledged his genius, so they embraced Darwin because he spoke to the post–Civil War reality they knew. In this, Tonalism was ingrained in the reformist movements of the era. By embracing change on the one hand and retreating to an enduring past on the other, Tonalism provided respite for a troubled and often ambivalent nation. This ambivalence toward modernity and rapid change is found in the lingering doubts of a positivist like William James, in the worldly and world-weary skepticism of Henry Adams who turned to the Virgin of Chartres for measure of the failures of his age, in Whitman's plainspoken ironies on the body electric, in La Farge's search for spiritual grace in distant Japan and the South Seas, in Henry James's retreat to England and a mystical other world and Stephen Crane's sardonic red badge of courage, and in Charles de Kay's insistence on an American art that was expressive of enduring values but open to new currents of mind and technical innovation—above all of sentiment at once real, soul-jarring, and ultimately tragic. The Tonalist landscape mirrored all this and more to a people supremely practical and profoundly idealistic, filled with a love of the concrete but nourished by a wildly swerving spiritual bent. Tonalism embodied the hopes and fears of two embattled and reformist generations seeking to be better. Its triumph was the avoidance of false sentimentality, the easy answers to tough questions. As Darwin had to extrapolate his theory of evolution from his thirteen varieties of finches and the dissection of a thousand barnacles (his centers of creation), so Inness had to fight his way through dozens of ruined canvases to produce a single masterpiece. The glory was in the wastage. In this, Tonalism was true to the practical and unflinching genius of its age.

Tonalism: City and Country and the Remove to Summer Haunts

The Tonalist landscape, like the spiritual and literary culture that sustained the private and mystical bent of many late-Victorian Americans, was an inward manifestation of an outward longing: to go out from the cities to the rural retreats of winter dreams and summer rapture. The art reflects a nostalgia for a lost innocence—before the Civil War blew the past to bits—and the careless days of youth. Such longings, as noted earlier, were immemorial, going back to Virgil and Horace and the Greeks. Emerson and Thoreau had set the mold for Americans, but what had once been a trickle in their day, when a visit to Maine or Cape Cod was worth an essay or a book by Thoreau, became a wholesale exodus to the countryside from the 1870s on, for artists and average citizens alike. Following the lead of naturalist John Burroughs, no one demonstrated or advocated the saving grace of nature and the health to be derived there more than Theodore Roosevelt: president, hunter, accomplished naturalist (the naturalist John Muir was astonished at the acuity of his sharp observations), birder, and all-around outdoorsman, the man responsible for setting aside 260 million acres of national parks and bird sanctuaries. What Emerson and Thoreau had set in motion—the motion of the soul toward accommodation with nature, Roosevelt put into practice and promoted as part of a vigorous lifestyle. The wilderness experience became a national pastime.

For two generations, Roosevelt embodied the ideals of the outdoor life. The nation literally followed in his footsteps, buoyed by the promptings of his friend John Borroughs—who made of the outdoor life a thing of near religious devotion along the lines set down by Thoreau. To hike the trails of the near-at-home woodlands and more distant wilderness areas was for Borroughs, who freely employed Darwinian tropes and turns of phrase from Thoreau and Emerson, an exaltation and fulfillment of the needs of the human species. "Man can have but one interest in nature, namely, to see himself reflected or interpreted there, and we quickly neglect both poet and philosopher who fail to satisfy, in some measure, this feeling."[215] Strangely, too, the melancholy exhilaration at the heart of Emerson and Thoreau is reprised in the life and writings of both Borroughs and the blustering hunter-warrior Roosevelt. For a man who proclaimed the rights and responsibilities of civilization, Roosevelt retained a certain ambivalence about civilized life reminiscent of Thoreau: like so many in his generation, the teeming growth of the cities represented as much a curse as a blessing. In 1916 he wrote, "The man should have youth and strength who seeks adventure in the wide, waste spaces of the earth, in the marshes, and among the vast mountain masses, in the northern forests, amid the steaming jungles of the tropics, or on the desert of sand or of snow. He must long greatly for the lonely winds that blow across the wilderness, and for sunrise and sunset over the rim of the empty world."[216]

If the Civil War had been an unbearable trauma, the pace of urban and industrial change in its aftermath was an unrelenting burden for many. The rapid and profound changes that rocked American society in the decades after 1870 were unprecedented and unrelenting. Henry Adams's autobiography of 1907, *The Education of Henry Adams*, is in essence an exploration of the forces of change and the multiplicity and chaos that left society wallowing in its wake. "Henry Adams was Darwinist because it was easier than not, for his ignorance exceeded belief… The proof that one had acted wisely because of obeying the primordial habit of nature flattered one's self-esteem."[217]

But as to the forces shaping his era, Adams opted for Stoic agnosticism: it was all chaos and multiplicity, forces that could neither be understood nor controlled. In these decades, America made the transition from a fundamentally agrarian economy to an industrial economy in less than two generations: an urban-industrial economy that saw the rise of the great cities of Chicago and Pittsburgh, steel and coal and oil cartels, labor unions, massive immigration, and the emptying out of the agricultural hinterland of the eastern states as the nation moved west. The historian Louis Menand has observed, "The United States in the 1890s was a society fractured along many lines: the South against the North, the West against the East, labor against capital, agriculture against industry, borrowers against lenders, people who called themselves natives against the new immigrants."[218] With all the overblown expectations in the aftermath of the Civil War about reconciliation, unity, and a new harmony, the reality proved dismal: there was the failure of Reconstruction and the disenfranchisement of Southern blacks, labor unrest resulting in the Pullman strikes of 1894, following the Panic of 1893, and constant recriminations around ideologies of gold and silver. The influx of new technologies from electricity to the telephone, the combustion engine and skyscrapers, and the creation of huge industrial complexes and cartels were overwhelming to many, as were the millions of new immigrants arriving every year and the threat they posed to jobs and cultural norms.

Insecurity weighed on everyone's mind. The historian H. W. Bands has written of the enormous dislocations of 1890s: "The cities in the 1890s were caught between two eras of American life. They were neither the villages and small towns where people all knew and took care of one another, though many Americans wished they were, nor were they the models of rationality and efficiency the Progressives were trying to make them into. To use another analogy, the cities were a new ecological niche, a tidal zone between past and future. As in biology, where new forms of life flourish in boundary regions, so in the evolution of societies: the urban machines were a societal species peculiarly adapted to the region between the low tide of the preindustrial past and high tide of the machine age. On this analogy—and the experience of the 1890s and after—the machines wouldn't simply go away. Where they disappeared, they would have to be replaced by something else."[219]

Paradoxically, Tonalism was essentially an urban art. It appealed to an urban commercial class and was purchased by urban dwellers, who longed for the country. Before modern sewer systems and public health programs, cities could be pestilential in summer, and in the era before fans and air-conditioning, the heat could kill. Tons of horse droppings littered the streets of Manhattan and yellow-fever cases were recorded on Fifth Avenue. It was precisely this unrequited romantic dream of a return to bucolic roots that made the life and writing of Thoreau so appealing to the city dweller. Thoreau's posture of rejecting the commercial straitjacket of American success, the "bitch-goddess of success" (another expression coined by William James), for a return to a simpler more authentic life, and one rooted in rural values, captured the imagination of urban denizens.

Fashionable Saratoga, up the Hudson River, had served New York as an escape since the early decades of the nineteenth century. Even before the Civil War, resorts and watering places had sprung up in picturesque mountain and waterside locales, like Virginia's famous White Sulphur Springs and its northern counterparts that catered to the socially prominent and those who aspired to such. The railroads further opened up the nearby country to rural resorts. The rural suburbs of New York City, across the Hudson in New Jersey, were favorites, and Tuxedo Park, New York, north of the city became a famous and fashionable retreat for the wealthy. Along the Connecticut coast in Cos Cob, Old Lyme, and Mystic, country living near the sea was only a train ride away. When George Inness, Charles Warren Eaton, and Ralph Blakelock commuted to their New York studios from their suburban homes in Montclair and the Oranges, northern New Jersey was still rural in character. The Catskills, Lake George, and the Adirondacks could be reached in a day's journey. In the 1870s, *Scribner's Magazine* and *Harper's Monthly* regularly ran articles advocating camping trips and spending time outdoors for health. Wrote Walt Whitman in his early years as editor of the Brooklyn Eagle: "[Y]oung fellows… should be in the habit of daily spending an hour or two in some out-door game or recreation. The body and mind would both be benefited by it."[220]

For Bostonians, Nahant, on the Massachusetts coast, had long been an escape, with its spectacular views of crashing sea and bracing ocean air. By the 1850s, Newport replaced Nahant for the fashionable and discriminating lover of the outdoors, providing William Morris Hunt and John La Farge with inspiration for their first great forays into Tonalist landscapes. Later, in the decades after the Civil War, Newport would become a mecca for the ultra-wealthy. The Isles of Shoals off the New Hampshire coast, most famously Appledore where the writer Celia Thaxter grew her seaside garden, immortalized by the American Impressionist Childe Hassam, became a favorite retreat for Boston's elite. More distant, Mount Desert, a splendid island of spectacular rocky coastlines in Maine, provided visions of rugged coasts and seas for intrepid visitors and artists alike. Winslow Homer settled in Prouts Neck on the Maine coast, prompting his masterpieces of sea and sky. The fishing port of Gloucester on Massachusetts' North Shore and Cape Cod both became artists' haunts in the decades before 1900.

With steamship and railroad access, the nearby Catskill Mountains became home grounds for artists like J. Francis Murphy, who bought a cottage in Arkville near Alexander

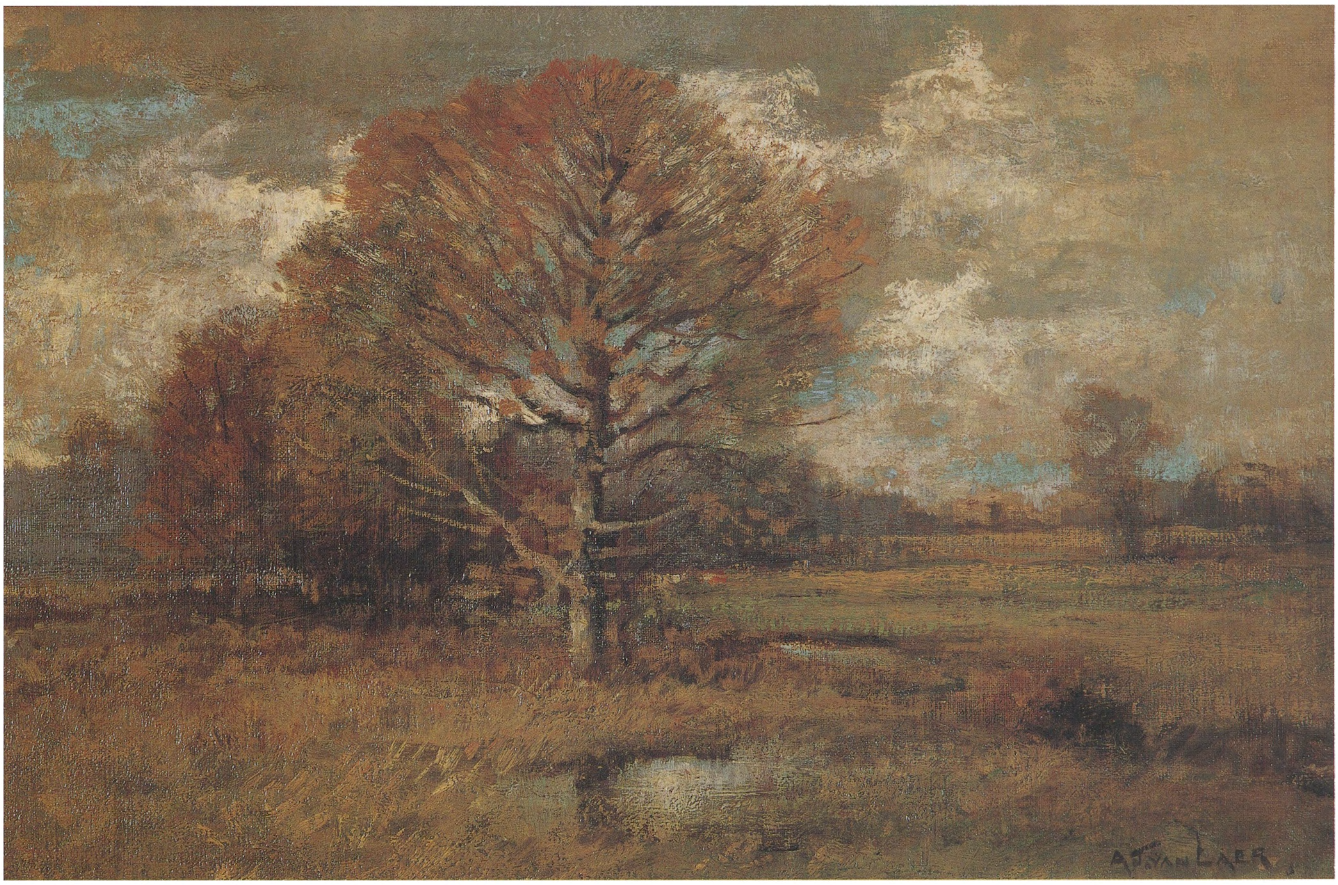


Fig. 7.50.2. Alexander Van Laer, *Fall Fields,* c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Private collection.

Wyant, who later moved farther out to the Keene Valley near Lake Placid. There was North Conway, New Hampshire, where Inness spent a few summers, and Milton, New York, where some of Inness's most innovative landscapes were painted out of doors.

Resorts catering to every wallet sprang up all over New England and upstate New York, many in the White Mountains and later the Berkshires, where Lenox became a sporting ground for the newly rich. Destinations like Mount Washington or Mount Holyoke became popular, as did day trips up the Merrimack River to view the laurel, made famous by New England's most favored elegiac poet, John Greenleaf Whittier. But soon resorts became crowded and the boardinghouse life with its dirty rooms and bad food spoiled the charm of even the most bucolic of retreats, while the appearance of droves of the socially undesirable middle-class tourists caused many a blue-blooded Yankee to seek a more private country abode.

By the late 1870s, anyone who could afford it bought or rented or built a cabin or cottage in the country. The summer dispersal to rural retreats from Maine to Florida became a way of life. Almost every Tonalist artist followed this seasonal migration. Summer and fall impressions were stored up for winter reveries in snowbound city studios. The artists, like the summer people who took houses in small towns and villages across New England, brought with them their volumes of Emerson and Thoreau, Whitman and Whittier, and later the indispensable nature writings of John Burroughs and the hunting sagas of Theodore Roosevelt.

These sojourners in Thoreau's footsteps, who scoured the countryside of moribund farms in search of their own Walden, only became more enamored of Thoreau's writing as they, too, discovered their own back roads, admiring and meditating on the fieldstone walls fallen into desuetude across their properties, or the overgrown pastures and the cellar holes sprouting birch trees that dotted the hills and copses beyond their cottage windows. This is the defunct rural Eden that inspired Robert Frost's early poetry. Within a generation, the forests would reclaim these abandoned farms and the scattered woodlots of the early settlers would become forests once more. In the 1890s, the countryside preserved a precarious balance between the way it was and what was yet to be. The sensitive observer could feel this in his bones. No artist better captured this fleeting quality of the landscape undergoing transformation than J. Francis Murphy. His *Landscape at Dusk,* 1908 (fig. 7.51), with its wispy brush marks and indistinct scattering of logs, broken fences, and perhaps the remnants of a stone fireplace in the left middle ground, speaks volumes to a fading way of life. Murphy's sublime artistic vision, thoroughly modern in execution, manages to encompass a Darwinian sense of change that is at once inevitable, sad, yet strangely lyrical.

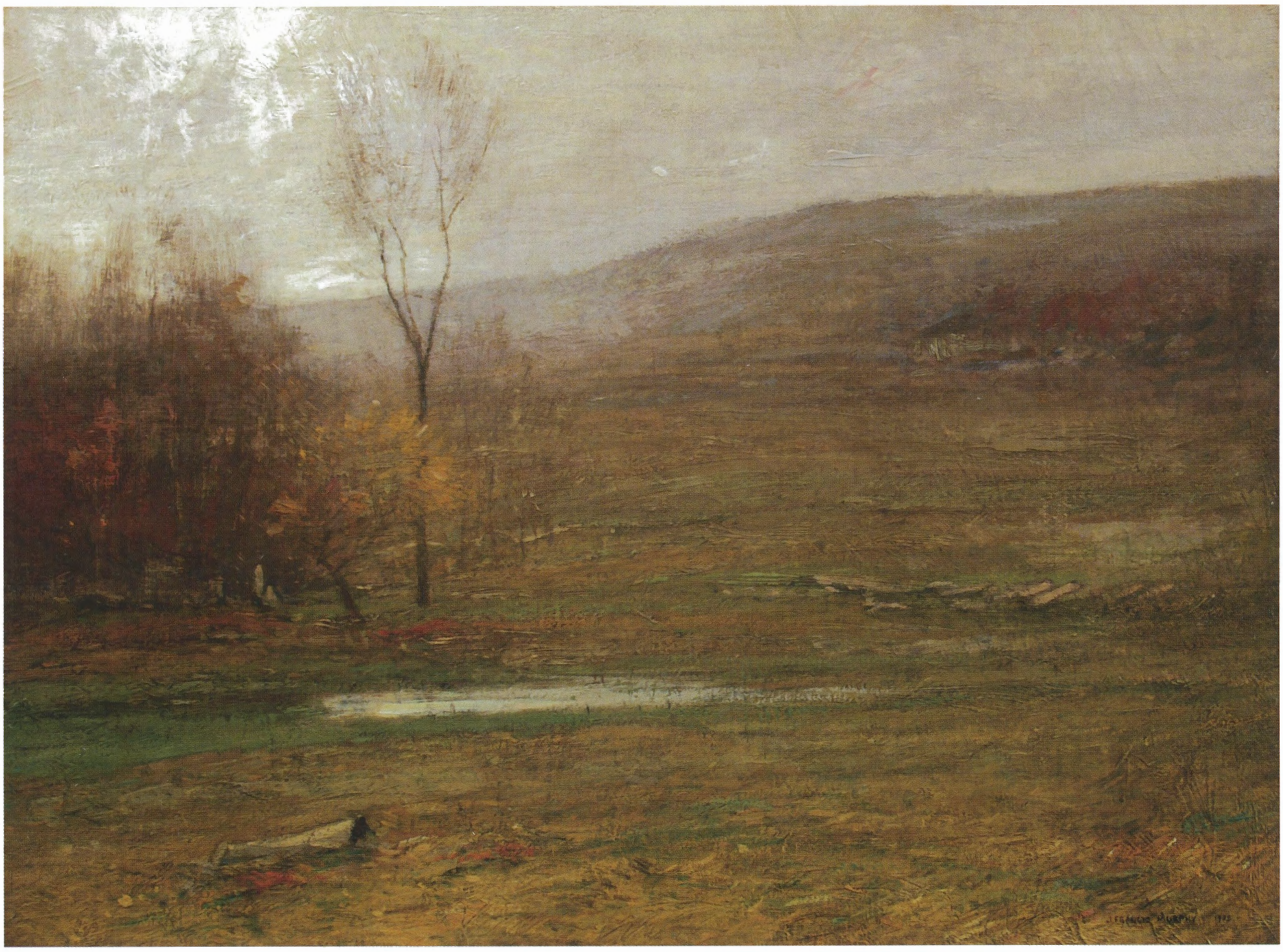


Fig. 7.51. J. Francis Murphy, *Landscape at Dusk*, 1908. Oil on canvas, 16 x 22 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

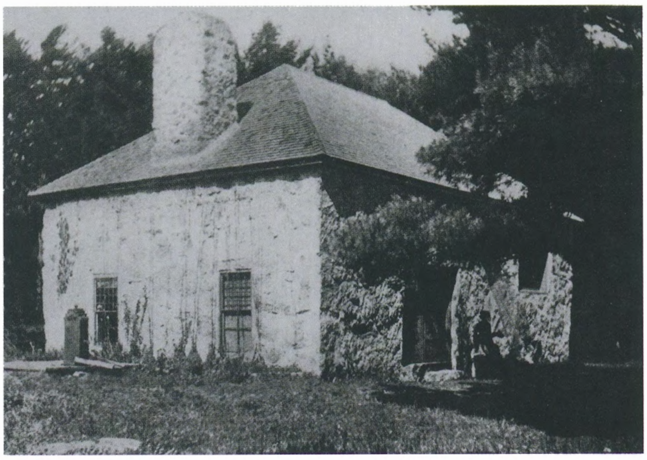


Fig. 7.52. The Gilders' summer house and studio in Marion, Massachusetts.

Like Murphy, the busy William James also sought refuge from the city—and sanity in a life close to the land. James bought up an abandoned hardscrabble farm surrounded by fieldstone walls in Chocorua, New Hampshire, where the air was filled with the incense of pines and evocations of a simple life. This summer retreat became the epicenter of what James considered health-mindedness. William Gilder and Helena de Kay Gilder had a retreat in Marion, Massachusetts, at the head of Buzzards Bay, where artists and writers flocked to their company, as they did to their evening soirées on Fifteenth Street in New York. Stanford White redesigned an old saltworks building on the property located in a pine grove—"the secret of Marion's charm"—for the Gilders (fig. 7.52). "In the evening their friends and neighbors assembled here; and here were held many happy, care-free, and unconventional gatherings so dear to my father's heart."[221] Between painting, poetry, and editing chores, the Gilders indulged in spirited talk, private theatricals, and revived homespun traditions from childhood. Their guests included President and Mrs. Grover Cleveland, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Henry James, and Charles Dana Gibson. As one guest wrote of Helena de Kay Gilder's life in Marion, "The woods and sea fall naturally into her background and make one think it best always to live in the country, in elemental instead of complex conditions."[222] Henry Ward Beecher commented in the 1860s, "Even one day in the country is good. But not till you settle down, and cut the string that binds you to the city, shove out its cares, and rid yourself of its excitements, can you feel the genuine comfort and happiness of being in the country."[223]

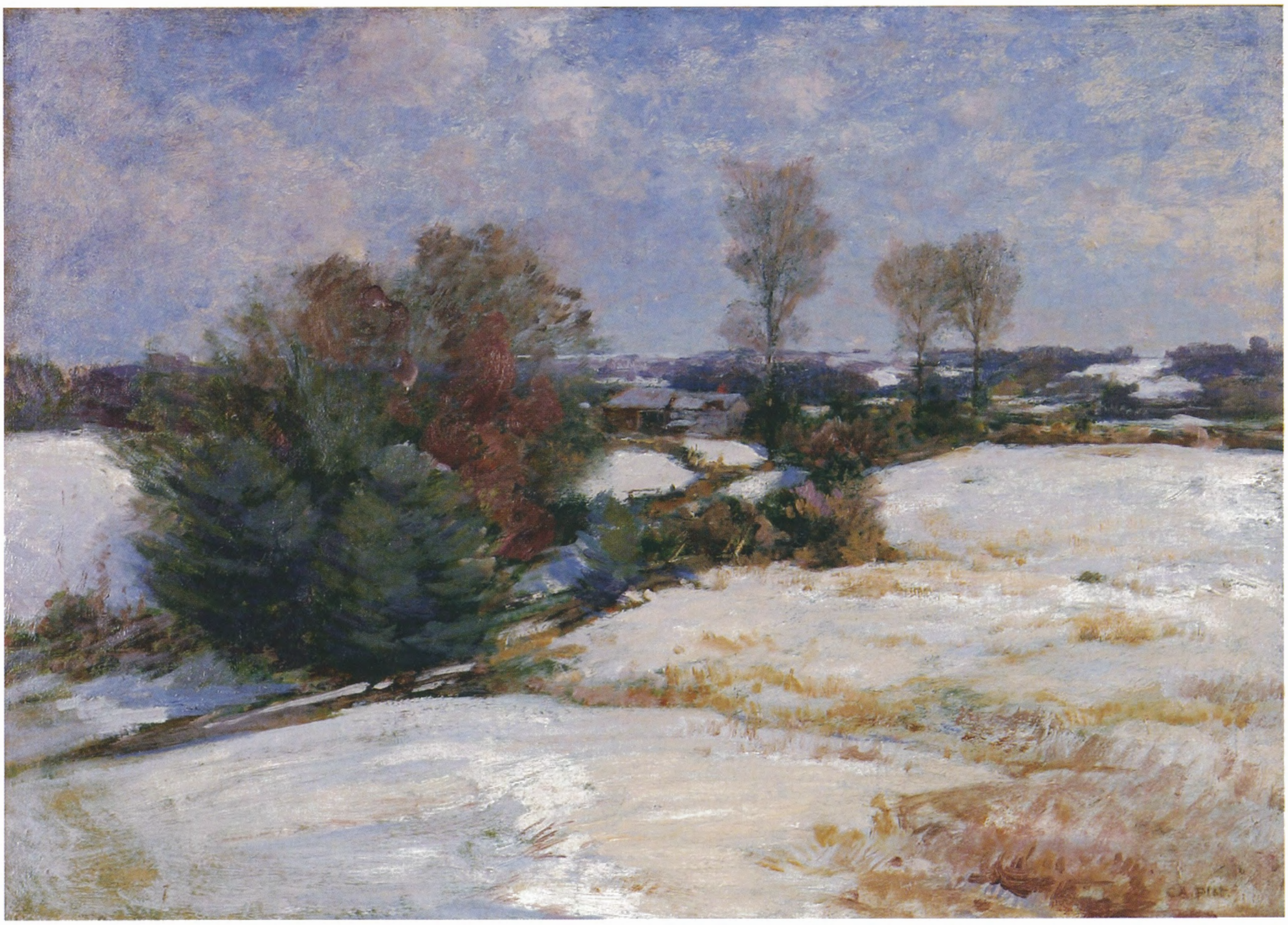


Fig. 7.53. Charles Platt, *Winter in Cornish, New Hampshire*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 18 x 26 in. Courtesy Brock & Co.

For many years, Thomas Dewing and his artist wife, Maria Oakley Dewing, summered in the artists' colony of Cornish, New Hampshire, not far from the year-round home of artist Henry Abbott Thayer, who was inspired to some of his grandest Tonalist landscapes by nearby Mount Monadnock. The Cornish hills, dotted with a few, remaining, magisterial white pines, provided not only the motifs for many of Dewing's finest landscapes but also the setting for garden parties and amateur theatrical productions as well as an insider's culture of uplift and refinement. The writings of Emerson and Thoreau were the mantra of the lifestyle—or, as one resident of Cornish observed, "Life in the poetry of things." [224] After a day of painting, writing, gardening, and afternoon tea, the Cornish crowd would often indulge various rituals to savor the moment of suspended time. One resident of Cornish, Maude Howe Elliott, remembered it thus: "Sometimes we joined an evening picnic. I remember one when the guests assembled on a high hilltop in time to watch the sun set, and remained to see the full moon rise. The children made oak garlands to deck the tables and crown themselves. In the gathering twilight they danced like joyous elves against the purple background of the mountain."[225] Here the religion of art reached something of an apogee, when Walter Pater's ideas about art for art's sake struck deep roots in the New Hampshire hills. As Pater expressed for a generation that revered his every word, "For our one chance lies in expanding the interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time.... Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire for beauty, the love or art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake."[226] Life in Cornish epitomized the finest aspirations of the fin-de-siècle artistic establishment: art was woven into every element of residents' lives. As a writer for *The Century Magazine* in 1906 noted of the homes at Cornish—in particular the home of Tonalist artist and architect Charles Platt (*Winter in Cornish, New Hampshire*, c. 1890, fig. 7.53)—there was a seamless flow between interior rooms and outdoor garden spaces. "One sometimes sees rooms wherein art has been so breathlessly pursued that the position of each object is the result of the most careful consideration, the most intense and pious care, until one feels as if no chair or table would dare to move an inch for fear of disturbing the color scheme; and garden and grounds are done in like manner. At Cornish there is nothing of this strained and uncomfortable

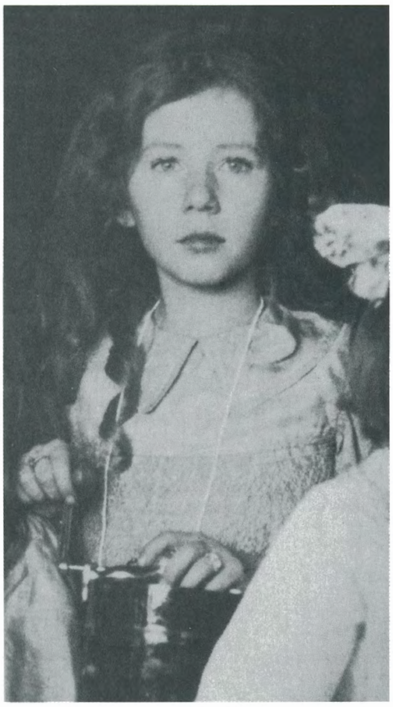


Fig. 7.54. Agnes de Mille at Merriewold.

art. A garden is not sacred and a thing apart… It is simply an outgrowth of the house, an out-of-door living-room, to be used and changed if one pleases, until one finds the best possible arrangement."[227]

In the foothills of the Catskills, a young Agnes de Mille (fig. 7.54), the future choreographer and masterful writer, spent her summer childhood at Merriewold, a woodland retreat built by the George (Henry George was the famous economist who proposed a single tax on land) and de Mille families. Here, too, the original farms and tanning industries were defunct, and the dirt-poor locals were thankful for the jobs building and washing and caretaking for the Merriewold crowd of New York intellectuals and bankers. In her autobiography written late in life, *Where the Wings Grow*, Agnes de Mille wrote of the enchantments of the woods at her summer home—an enchantment Ben Foster's *Dusk Amidst the Pines*, circa 1910 (see fig. 5.130) so splendidly captures. "This was a stand of white pine as fine as any in the state. And it was thick. Underneath not a sprig of green could grow and one walked on carpets of needles and through shafts and splinters of light. The only sound was the perpetual soughing in the top branches, the gurgle and chuckle of the small waterfall that poured in glistening sheets over moss-bright rocks, a noble stand of trees which had escaped the holocaust, black in summer against the surrounding forest green, green in the winter and always there sighing. It was a place for contemplation, a place for picnics, a place for secrets, a place for wandering and speculating. It was a haven for many hearts. And it was our signature."[228] Artistically minded families like the de Milles and millions of other Americans around the turn of the century saw such bucolic escapes from the teaming and dirty cities as the enduring enchantment of their lives, the sustenance they drew on as summer after summer, as fall gave way to winter, when winter dreams of summer's sensuous pleasures got many through seasons of cold and despair.

For the naturalist John Burroughs, who spent a lifetime hiking the wilderness, a corner of the wild to call one's own recreated a certain primal bond—a bond known to every Tonalist. "When looked out upon from one's own spot of earth, how much more beautiful and significant they [the changing seasons] are! Nature comes home to one most when he is at home; the stranger and traveler finds her a stranger and a traveler also. One's own landscape comes in time to be a sort of outlying part of himself; he has sowed himself broadcast upon it, and it reflects his own moods and feelings; he is sensitive to the verge of the horizon: cut those trees, and he bleeds; mar those hills, and he suffers."[229]

All across America the "summer people" took up residence for the season in some of the country's still unspoiled places, and then saw to it they remained unspoiled. From the 1880s on, these residents became fixtures of American life and popular literature, getting on as best they could with the "country people," the locals, who who no longer tilled the rocky New England soil for subsistence were resentful of the city interlopers but relied on their patronage. As many of the mill towns of New England went into decline, as the old ports along the coasts of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Maine fell into decrepitude, the inhabitants became dependent on the city folks to see them through. Many among the urban tourists embarked on annual pilgrimages, less intent on following Thoreau's path and finding the peace of nature than hoping to reconnect with the quaint charm of an older America. Some returned from the West to gaze longingly on their ancestral homesteads. The historian Van Wyck Brooks has written in his poignant volume *New England: Indian Summer, 1865–1915*, "There were some who had lost all memory of the land of their fathers, as the Yankees had lost their memory of the mother-country; while in others this homesickness had mounted with the years, so that the scene was touched for them with magic. They sought out the sacred objects, familiar by name in their childhood, of which they had read in Whittier, the 'neighborhood' poet, the lighthouses, the old schoolhouses, the beaches, more fabulous yet to many who had never seen the ocean; and often they ransacked some family attic, with its old hoopskirts and broken chairs, relics of the 'hand-made' days and the days of the war, shells from battlefields, haversacks and bayonets, spinning-wheels, wrecked portraits and rusty muskets. All this was natural and touching, and so was the hunger for beauty that was bred in the city, the eagerness of the summer people for every tidbit of sea and landscape and all that was quaint and charming in the ways of the natives…."[230]

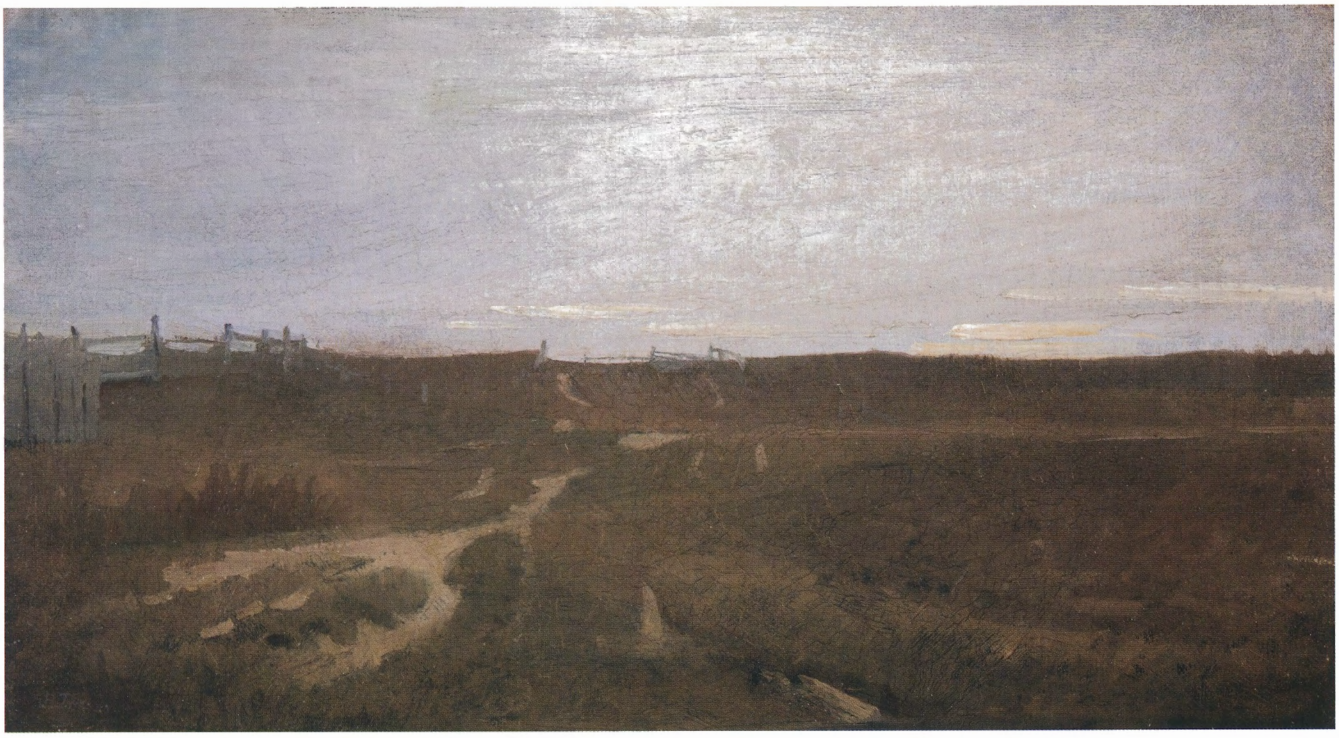


Fig. 7.55. Abbott Thayer, *Road at Nantucket*, c. 1881. Oil on canvas, 8 x 14 in. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

No one evoked this declining world of small-town New England better than the short-story writer Sarah Orne Jewett, daughter of a physician, who often accompanied her father on his medical rounds as he attended to the declining population around the old port of Berwick, Maine. Jewett's travels as young girl, which were the source of her stories, touched on the melancholy decline of rural Maine and a passionate nostalgia for a vanishing past. Her stories track a young woman's feelings for a lost world of youth, of family, of community, which animates the social history at the heart of Tonalism: the abandoned pastures, roads, woodlots, farmhouses, and tumbled fieldstone walls that form the style's core imagery. Brooks spoke of Jewett's youthful ramblings: "Later, on her horse, she roamed beyond, exploring the woodpaths and clearings, the cellar-holes and abandoned graveyards, the hollows where the lilacs bloomed in Maytime. She found forsaken orchards, with gnarled and tangled apple-trees spreading their shriveled arms abroad; and often, at the end of some dim trail, she discovered the ghosts of a garden, with honeysuckle, sweet marjoram, lilies and mallows. Sometimes, in a clearing, she happened on a lonely dwelling where an old woman sat on the doorstep, or she saw two sisters spinning yarn, stepping back and forth at their big wheels. But many of the houses were deserted and empty, with floors that creaked as she crossed them, and the windows shook in their loosened frames or lay in the grass below. She would build a fire in the crumbling hearth and imagine the life that had once been lived there. She liked these silent, long-lost places, with a few bits of bright colour relieving the green of the woods or the white of the snow. She seemed to die out of the world in this forest quiet, where everything was merged in the life of nature."[231]

If Thoreau's old and deserted roads are a guide to the mystical inheritance of Tonalism, Jewett's nostalgia (many of her short stories were first published in Gilder's *The Century Magazine*) tells much of the story of the lost history of people and places that captivated the mind of artists and patrons alike. Such a lost history forms the subliminal subject of Abbott Thayer's *Road at Nantucket*, circa 1881 (fig. 7.55). Here, too, Thoreau and Darwin's paths begin to cross, where the farmer's fields were reclaimed by the forest, where the few old names left in the neighborhood were only found carved into the canted headstones of the abandoned cemetery, where the summer people put down new roots for their own children. These were America's archaeological ruins, of myth and memory and imagination mixed, preserved by a few lines of poetry or an imperishable image on canvas. As far back as 1853, Henry Ward Beecher had recognized, as did Inness, whose work he avidly collected, the spiritual import of New England's abandoned farms. "The rugged pastures which inclose many of these beautiful farms are samples of what the farms once were, and a gauge of the degree of labor which they have cost. A highly cultivated farm is *always* an object of beauty; but in the rocky parts of New England, a fine farm has a *moral* beauty; it is an enduring mark and measure of indomitable industry."[232]

Looking back from old age, Henry Adams well understood the chasm that still separated town and country life: "Life was a double thing. The double exterior nature gave life its relative values. Winter and summer, cold and heat, town and country,

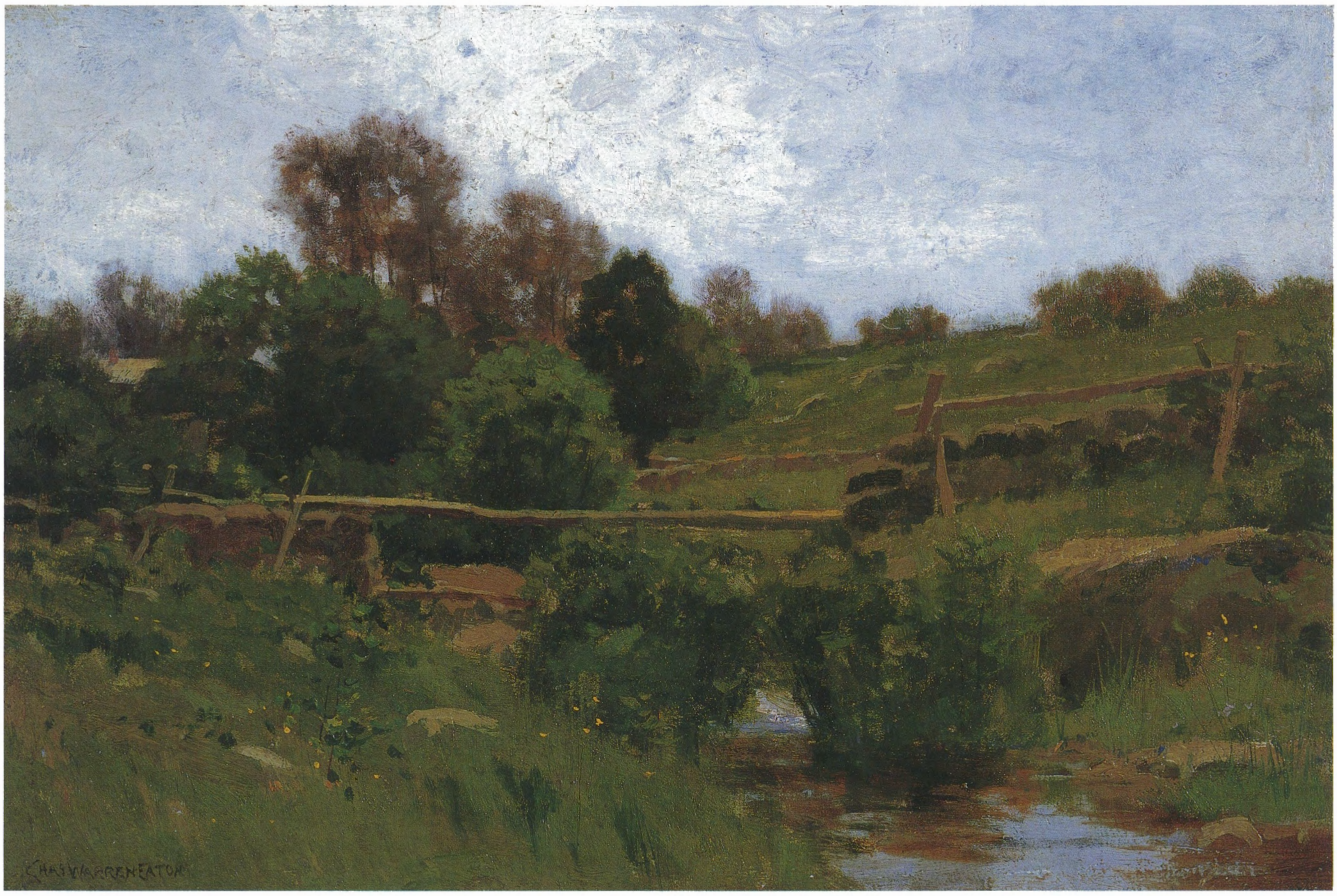


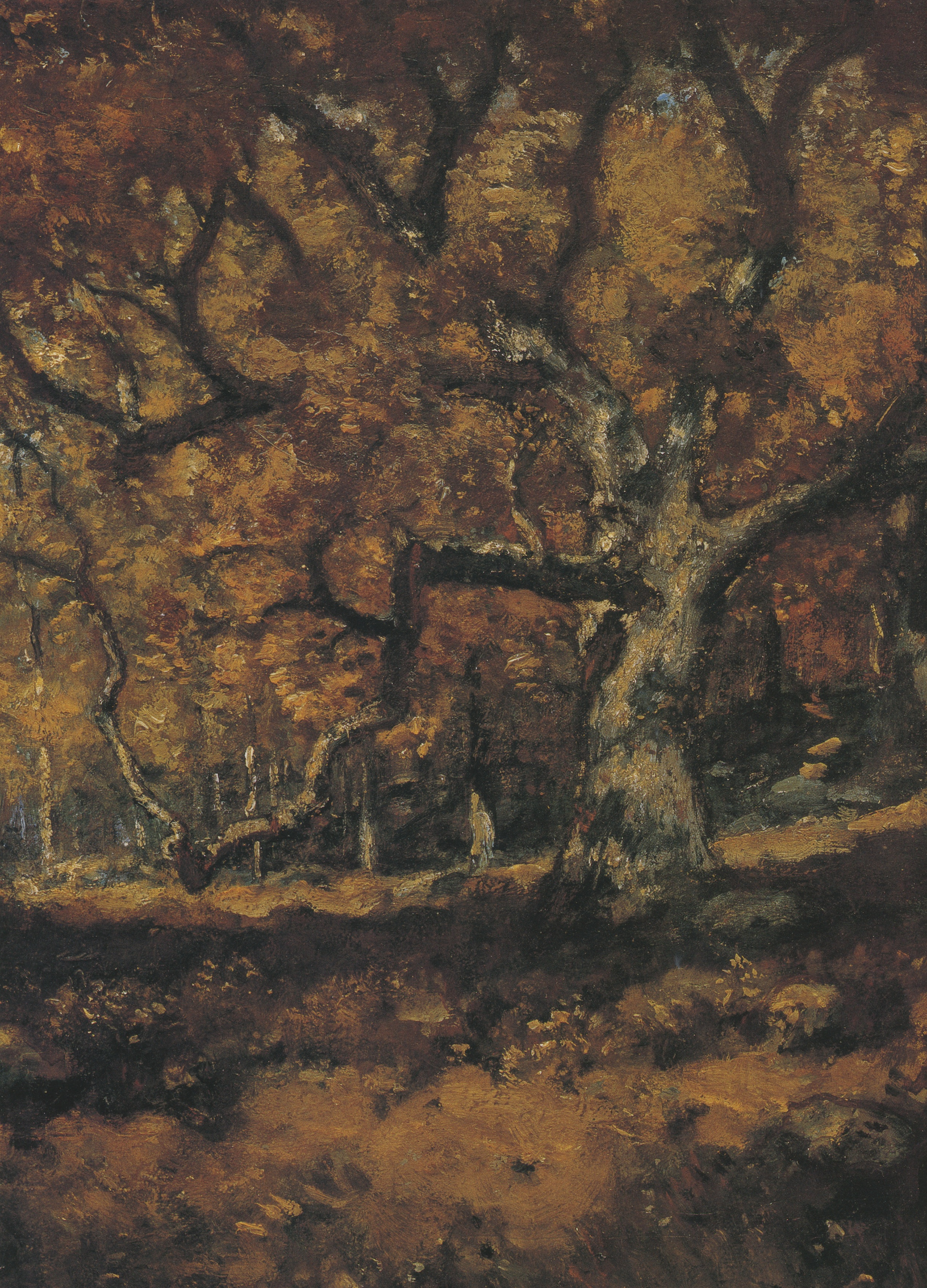
Fig. 7.56. Charles Warren Eaton, *The Brook*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Private collection.

force and freedom, marked two modes of life and thought, balanced like lobes of the brain." For the New Englander like Henry Adams, the city winter was bitter cold, and dark for months on end, in Adams's stark summation, "Winter was always the effort to live; summer was tropical license." The country meant the turning of the seasons and the regaining of childhood joys: "liberty, diversity, outlawry, the endless delight of mere sense impressions given by nature for nothing, and breathed by boys without knowing it ... To the boy, Henry Adams, summer was drunken. Among senses, smell was the strongest—smell of hot pine-woods and sweet-fern in the scorching summer noon; of new-mown hay; of ploughed earth; of box hedges; of peaches, lilacs, syringas; of stables, barns, cow-yards; of salt water and low time on the marshes; nothing came amiss." This dichotomy, summer's cornucopia versus winter's imprisoning walls and icy streets, remained for Adams "the most decisive force he ever knew."[233]

Something of the underlying power of the landscapes Tonalists were moved to paint, stirring those who lived between the Civil War and World War I, is captured in the popular poetry of the day, especially that of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and William Cullen Bryant. Today, much of this "Victorian" poetry is dismissed for its prodigal use of what John Ruskin famously derided as the "pathetic fallacy," attributing to nature and natural processes the emotions and feeling of the human condition. Even as fine a writer as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly*, edited Emily Dickinson, and was the poetry editor of the *The Nation* for twenty-six years, could overindulge in natural similes and metaphors. Though sometimes sentimental, often nostalgic, and always searching to make sense of a life full of contingency, the popular writers of the day expressed a deep and abiding kinship with the natural world, often by projecting their feelings onto their subjects as if to draw them closer. In *The Brook*, circa 1895 (fig. 7.56), Charles Warren Eaton was also projecting feelings onto his landscape, but avoided sentimentality, by virtue of sophisticated artistic execution and visual complexity (a footbridge obscured by bushes, a rooftop peeking through trees, a stone wall mended with split rails—perhaps an abandoned farm) that allows only enough clues so that the hidden narrative is intuited by the viewer, rather than imposed. It is a vignette of a place and time that a writer like Henry James could happily slip into his prose.

For many period collectors, Tonalist paintings took the place of devotional imagery, becoming the focus of a spirituality that had once been the preserve of traditional religion. George Inness alluded to this circumstance more than once: "Now let us assume that an artist, through a divine power, has been endowed with a keen sense to see the beautiful in nature that the ordinary layman who is chained to his desk cannot see. If we can give that man a canvas that will take him away from his desk and lead him into the field and make him feel what we feel when we hear the birds sing and see the grain wave, we have done something good. In our art this is what we should strive for."[234] On a less exalted level, at least for one collector of Inness in particular, Tonalist scenes simply opened up windows onto the lost and carefree country of childhood. "They always give me the feeling of nature. They seem to take me back to my childhood, which was spent in the woods of the Schawangunk [*sic*] Mountains. They are not photographs of trunks of trees and rock and things, but just out-of-doors. I feel that I am home again on the old farm, where I drove the cows, and when tired after work I sit down here and rest beside my Innesses. I have six of them. Which one I like the best I cannot say, sometimes it is this one, sometimes that; but they all tell the sweet story of the woods and fields."[235]

Tonalism reflects an acuity of vision often lost on us today. We literally have to close the doors on a busy world and dim the lights to properly enjoy the paintings in the way in which they were originally painted and made to be enjoyed. They are the manifestation of a lost world, of the silence and slow time known to the poetic sojourning of Emerson and Thoreau in Concord days past, and the painstaking explorations of Darwin; a world lost but found when the paintings are again allowed to speak their fill. Once considered the quaint effusions of a vapid and unsympathetic age, they can now be better understood as works of sophisticated artistry and complex emotions drawing on a culture—wounded but buoyant—as passionately engaged with existential issues as it was broad-minded in finding better solutions. Perhaps no art, before or since, contains such concentrated powers of pure, untrammeled feeling.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Tonalism and the Modernist Legacy

> *[T]he very fact the arts are not of familiar and everyday occurrence with us as with Europeans, should give our people the advantage, owing to a greater liberality of mind and to a freedom from tradition and prejudice. In other words, . . . the United States should be an open field for experiments in the fine arts . . . because the innovator here should find less of tradition, less of prejudice to encounter . . . the soil for his plant is more virgin.*
>
> —Charles de Kay, 1900[1]

By 1900, the Tonalist landscape was not only dominating the major exhibitions but also bringing the highest prices at auction and in dealers' showrooms. Figurative artists and Impressionists struggled. If the Tonalist landscape did not have quite the same look as the Aesthetic Tonalism that had flourished in the decade between 1880 and 1890, there was a reason. Emerson, Thoreau, and Darwin had been thoroughly integrated into the belief system of late-Victorian America: sweetness and light had been tempered with grief, cynicism, and a passionate engagement with nature. The display of deep-rooted spirit was not just accepted in art, but demanded of the artist. George Inness had set the mold of the artist-seer. As the country had grown, matured, struggled with its demons, and gained confidence, the Tonalist landscape tended to enlarge its physical scope, as if to accommodate such an outsized range of temperaments. With the end of the economic collapse of 1893 to 1897 (a depression resulting in 15,000 business and 500 bank failures, and unemployment ranging between 12 and 20 percent), the marketplace strengthened for larger and more expensive American pictures in oil—not to be outdone by the Fricks and Havemeyers, who feasted on the bargains to be had with European masters old and new—and the Gilded Age dollar developed a voracious appetite for art.

But monetization of scale alone, as has been seen in the work of Charles Melville Dewey, Frederick W. Kost, Harry Eaton, Ben Foster, and Charles Warren Eaton, was only one aspect of the change: the confluence of burgeoning national and artistic pride and the impact of Impressionism and post-Impressionist styles encouraged a freer, more expressive use of paint handling, though kept well within the quietist range of cool color—often approaching near monochrome around 1900. Nor had the energizing force of Munich bravura paint handling entirely faded, even if one of its greatest exponents, John Henry Twachtman, had opted for a quietest tonal style in his work of the late 1890s. There were always the examples of J. Frank Currier, Henry Muhrman, William Gedney Bunce, William Merritt Chase, James McNeill Whistler, and John Singer Sargent to encourage expressive bravura paint handling for American artists so inclined. By 1900, Chase, more by virtue of his teaching than his art, kept the Munich School spirit alive, encouraging his students to speak "in the language of paint."[2] In addition, as discussed in chapter 7, the critical emphasis on individual expression and the new fascination with psychology, spiritualism, dreams, Darwinism, symbolism, and the mysteries of human nature gave added impetus to the gestural handling of pigment.

This shift to a broader style of Expressive Tonalism can be found in the development of almost every major Tonalist artist, and was prominently on display in Paris in 1900. Even the late works of George Inness, Alexander Wyant, and Homer Dodge Martin featured in Paris were all large expressive canvases—exhibition pictures, of course, tended to be large. Whistler's two late portraits, one a self-portrait, *Brown and Gold*, and *Mother of Pearl and Silver: The Andalusian* were superb examples of his mature style of expressive paint handling. His self-portrait, *Brown and Gold*, was a particularly shattering psychological study of the terrible grief he suffered at his wife's death, the face of which Whistler scholar Richard Dorment described as "painted with brushwork of quivering, nervous intensity, unsparingly records the ravages of worry and anxiety."[3]

Among the younger painters on display in 1900, it was evident that American-trained artists Charles Warren Eaton, Ben Foster, and Leonard Ochtman had made the transition from Aesthetic Tonalism to a broader, more exuberant paint handling. Winslow Homer, too, was represented by marines of magnificently expressive handling, occasionally touching on Symbolist themes. In a similar manner, Charles Fromuth, William Coffin, Edward Redfield, William Gedney Bunce, William Lathrop, and many others were all proceeding along broadly similar lines of Expressive Tonalism, and would continue to do so over the next two decades. The impulse to embodied emotion was so universal that even a relatively conservative master of Aesthetic Tonalism like J. Francis Murphy reinvented himself in the years after 1900. His *Frosty Morning*, 1906 (fig. 8.1), displays breathtaking freedom of paint

OPPOSITE: Henry Ward Ranger. *The Woodland Scene*, c. 1905 (detail of fig. 8.58).

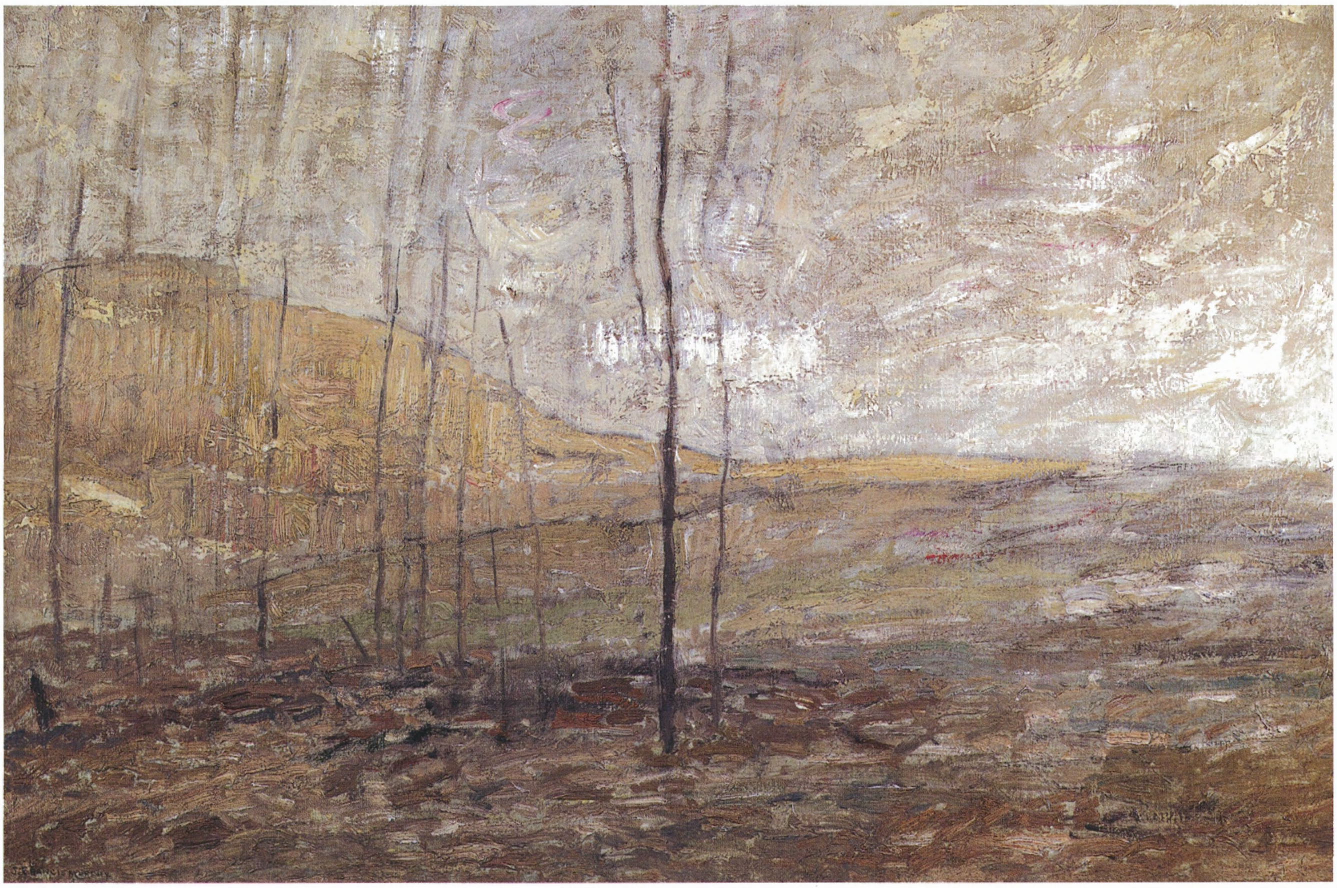


Fig. 8.1. J. Francis Murphy, *Frosty Morning*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Spanierman Gallery, New York.

handling and raw symbolic forms, not to mention a minimalist compositional structure, verging on full abstraction, that would do justice to today's finest contemporary artists. Whistler's early influence in terms of poetic, charming, formally complex, superbly balanced, and evocative landscapes had undergone a transformation between 1880 and 1900. His mature artistic persona had become a virtual international style, reengineered and reinterpreted across the spectrum of competing "isms," influencing Monet's late expressive tonal paintings of water lilies and creating a renewed interest in Manet (and Velázquez), which in turn engendered a growing obsession for Symbolist themes among Americans and Europeans alike.

This tenebrous feel for low-toned color was absorbed by scores of Americans in Paris around 1900; prominent among them were Robert Henri, William Redfield, and Chauncey Ryder, to name only a few. Even Picasso in his Blue and Rose periods shows the influence, if not of Whistler per se, certainly of a common allegiance to Velásquez's somber tonalities. In America, Expressive Tonalism was less about design, subtle pattern, and quietest charm—although these elements still persisted—and more about an orientation that stressed visceral impact and drama, and often a mysterious exploration of modernist anxieties. The new century gazed upon Inness with fresh eyes and found in him an old master who spoke directly to present hopes and future dilemmas, of a world of tragedy and beauty mixed.

Much of the credit for this transformation in artistic fortunes goes to the critic Charles de Kay, who must have been pleased with his handiwork: the creation and nurturing of a national, and burgeoning, movement of Tonalist landscape painting, which he and his many confederates in the Gilder circle—the collectors, clubs, and media outlets in their orbit—had been instrumental in promoting. De Kay had been only too aware of the hurdles that American art faced at the end of the 1870s, especially the enormous prestige of the European tradition and the straitjacket that it represented for the development of a distinctive American art. But he also recognized where the Americans had their competitive advantage. First, the very lack of tradition offered a degree of creative freedom and latitude to individual aspiration unlike anything in Europe. Second, the American near-at-home landscape, subject, and source (the mystical organic relationship between the perceiver and the perceived) of the poetic imagination tapped new wellsprings of artistic energy. Third, new art communities—societies, clubs, schools, and museums—formed that were decentralized, based on voluntary professional associations, and free from the hand of government control or direction. And fourth, the Transcendentalist tradition of Emerson and Thoreau offered spiritual consolation in the face of the lingering and bitter cynicism coming out of the Civil War.

De Kay didn't need to wave the bloody red flag for his generation: the festering wounds of conflict touched every aspect of late-Victorian culture, as Vietnam colored the last decades of the twentieth century for the generation that matured in the 1960s and 1970s (the hundred-year parallel is remarkable). These factors provided the background for the development of a distinct national tradition and, crucially, allowed quirky individualists like Albert Pinkham Ryder, Ralph Albert Blakelock, John Henry Twachtman, and even conservative radicals like J. Francis Murphy to flourish, or at least to survive. This development that emerged from the tinderbox of the American experience in those decades, for the most part unselfconsciously, is what distinguishes American progressivism and separates it from its European counterparts. It constituted a revolution, not imposed from outside or above, but growing organically from within. In this it is inherently conservative *and* radical, fueled equally by deductive ideas and inductive experiment: a commonsense path to the future.

De Kay had demanded just such an American art, which drew on the democratic resources of the nation, a system, or non-system, that encouraged ingenuity from the bottom up and not its imposition from the top down. This was essentially a Whitmanesque cultural democracy, in which the creative individual was encouraged to rise and shine—to outshine the competition, and by so doing, embody the deepest aspirations of his fellows "to the grand end, namely, the impression upon the public of the truth that the arts are one of the greatest glories of a nation, and that every citizen is but doing his duty when he aids, according to his means and capacity, their encouragement."[4] De Kay believed that the free play of creative and market forces—guided by a few enlightened critics—was key to a vital national art. By 1900 and the Paris Exposition Universelle, that goal had been largely accomplished and the decades after 1900 would see a further expansion of the Tonalist movement and the creation of some of its masterpieces.

Finally, after almost twenty years, America embraced its own. The price increases for Tonalist landscapes after 1900 were nothing less than astronomical. In major exhibitions across the country and internationally, the Tonalists dominated and won the majority of prizes. As was described in the previous chapter's discussion of Charles Warren Eaton's pine tree series, many of the best American landscapes showed a striking affinity with progressive movements in international art, especially the Symbolist landscapes of their European colleagues. The distinctive landscapes of early Aesthetic Tonalism had gained a poignant candor of emotion that probed the heart of nature as much as the complex emotions of an era fraught with wrenching change.

Charles de Kay, in effect, presided over the great transformation in American arts and letters and the emergence of American modernism. His career spanned the time in the late 1870s when American artists and writers maintained divided allegiances between the Old World and the new, and the beginning of a period of growing confidence in the generative force of American art. Like de Kay, in the decades before the turn of the century writers William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, Henry Adams, and even Henry James maintained a quiet if determined conviction that America, even if hampered by its jerkwater provincialism, was somehow better than Europe—more the "real right thing," in James's words. Homer, Sargent, and even Whistler shared this unspoken reverse snobbery about America's true value. By 1900 much of the earlier ambivalence about American art, its split allegiance to French or English influence, was fading: America had found its national voice and was proud to herald its own. Those who had resisted the allure of European cachet, of technique and style over substance, were now thrust forward as exemplars of that still small voice resonating in the American landscape, first embodied in the work of La Farge, Inness, Wyant, and Martin, and then in Blakelock and Ryder—and, in the sublime inventiveness of Twachtman, who died tragically young in 1902. Wrote Thomas Dewing at the passing of his colleague and friend, "In defining the quality of Twachtman's paintings, one would say that, first of all he was a master of 'values'—as much so as Whistler. . . . One of his paintings instantly arrests the eye of the connoisseur by a certain aspect, as original as Thoreau, and sometimes curiously like him."[5]

The gap left by Twachtman was profound and unfillable. He was an artist's artist, just as Thoreau had been a writer's writer, and Twachtman and Thoreau were two of the most profound spirits of a grassroots American vision. The cultural historian Van Wyck Brooks observed in 1940 about individualists like John Henry Twachtman, "It was those who remained in the frying-pan and paid the full price of their courage that later times revered as noble grandsires. For great works are great not, first of all, for technical reasons, but because they express the ethos of the race behind them. The great technique only confirms the greatness; and this becomes apparent when an age of manifold snobberies is followed by an age that seeks the real. *Noblesse oblige* was never truer than it was with men like Homer and Ryder, who cast their bread upon the waters, who gave their country bread in return for stones. They accepted the local conditions and built upon them."[6]

The Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, 1901

Charles de Kay was explicit about America's coming-of-age in 1901 when he reviewed the American paintings at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo (fig. 8.2), a world's fair that included exhibitions of manufactured goods along with the fine arts. Comparing the "home painters with those who reside abroad," he observed, "it appears that while in technical qualities there is no great difference, as many very clever handlers of the brush being found here as there are among Americans abroad, the foreign contingent is not remarkable for originality or imagination . . . as a rule, the foreign Americans

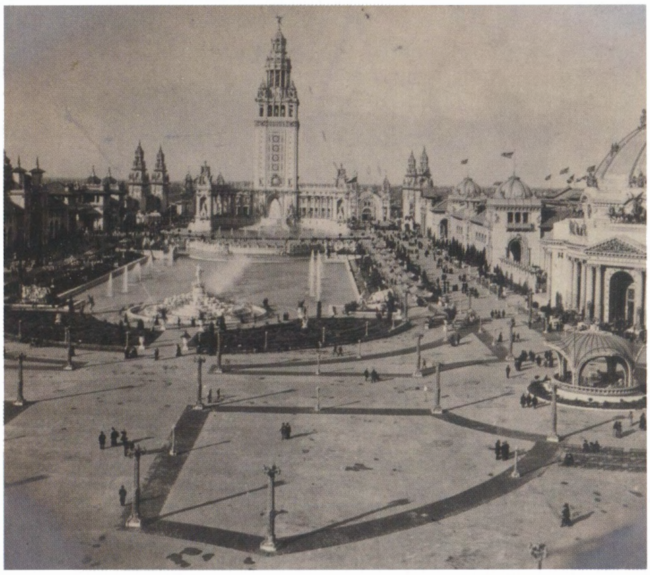


Fig. 8.2. The Buffalo Pan-American Exposition, 1901. The Pageant of America Collection, n.d.: Photography Collection, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints & Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

seem to be following the tendency in Europe to place method above matter. Imagination is a quality rare enough everywhere, and our home painters do not possess it in any too great a quantity; but they have more of it than the exiles, and perhaps hereafter they will add to this side of the National art, if the public will recognize the fact that painting is a form of expression like music or poetry and must command technique, not be the slave of the technical process, as it now so often is. The general effect of these galleries full of clever, brilliant, and now and then deeply imaginative works, is one of hope for the future of American art."[7] The note of slight ambivalence in de Kay's review can be attributed to the ongoing difficulties of putting together an exhibition that truly represented the best in American art, certainly in de Kay's eyes.

The Tonalist landscape painter William A. Coffin, along with the assistance of Henry Snell—also a Tonalist landscapist specializing in exquisitely modulated Tonalist marines and harbor scenes (*Evening, Polperro Harbor*, c. 1900, fig. 8.3)—who had been instrumental in assembling the works of New York artists for the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900, had worked hard to bring together the finest American work, trying to group artists by style and subject while assuring the celebrity artists that their works would be hung in a compact group and not indiscriminately scattered throughout the exhibition. One hundred prizewinners from the Society of American Artists, the National Academy of Design, and other institutions were included. A cross-section of Whistler's work was featured, along with paintings by Inness, Wyant, and Martin, and Alexander and Birge Harrison, as well as by Charles Warren Eaton, Leonard Ochtman, and Ben Foster, and a large selection

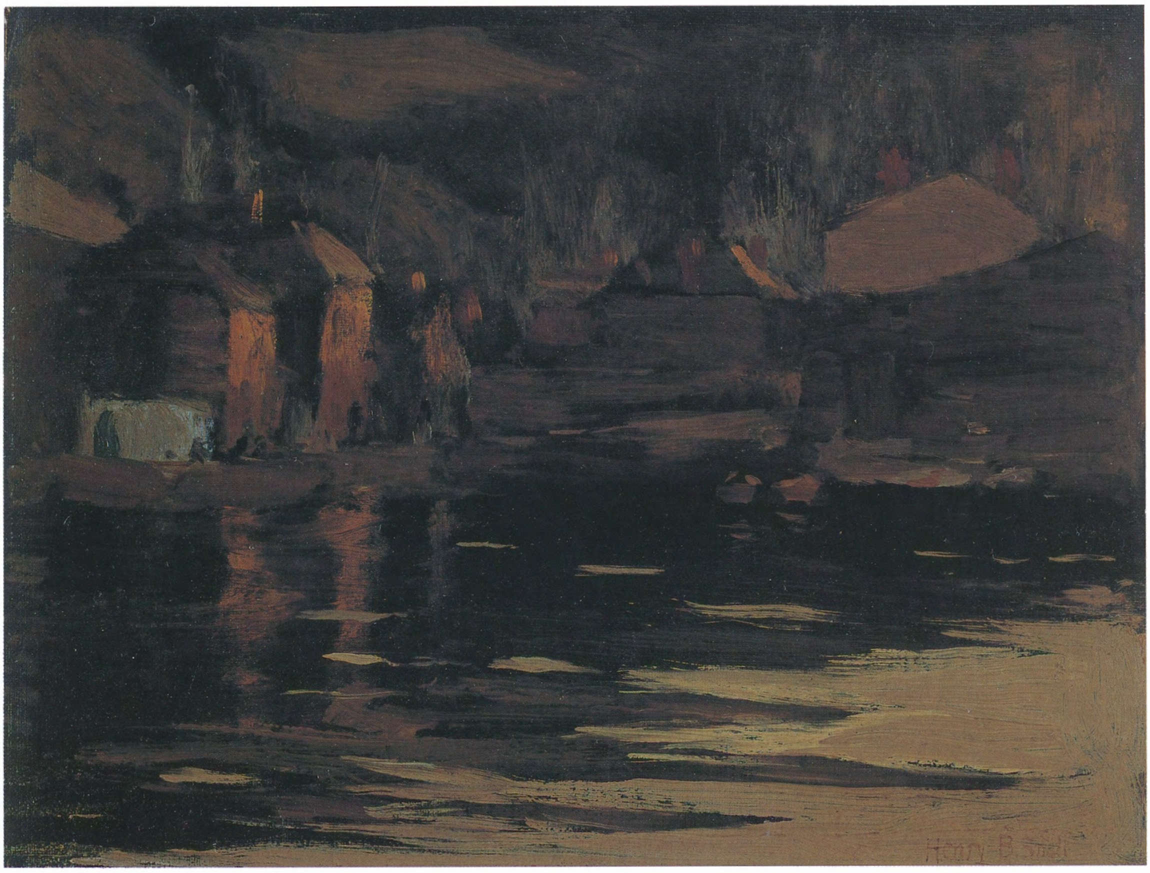
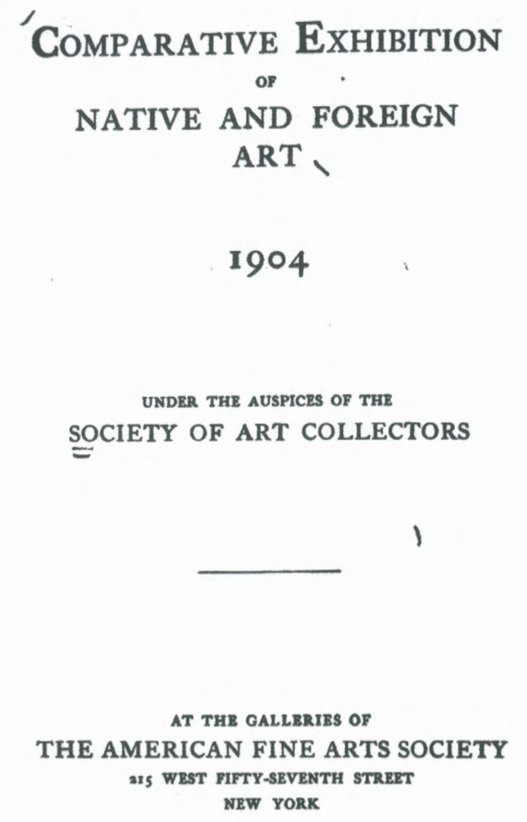


Fig. 8.3. Henry Snell, *Evening, Polperro Harbor*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas board, 7 x 9 in. Private collection.

of work by Dwight Tryon. Another reviewer commented in *Modern Culture* on the predominance of works in a tonal mode, noting, "the later fad for tonal painting," which had superseded American experiments with French Impressionism in the early 1890s. The reviewer attempted to educate her readers as to the term "tonal," explaining the style's origins in Whistler's work and in Japanese art. "Though Whistler himself never confined his tonal studies to any one key, either light or dark, some of his followers, going to the extreme, have reduced their schemes of color to lower and lower tones. . . . It is these extremists who have given the name to the school, and the meaning of the word "tonal" has been narrowed down to apply only to pictures which are dark or low in tone. The Exposition is rich in works of this character, in landscapes as well as figure."[8] Over the next fifteen years, similar expositions in Charleston, St. Louis, and San Francisco would further highlight the achievements of what was fast becoming known as the Tonal or Tonalist School.

The Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art, 1904

Perhaps no single event so galvanized the New York art world in support of American Tonalism as the Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art held at the Fine Arts Building on Fifty-Seventh Street in 1904 (fig. 8.4). It proved to be the game changer for American art. The exhibition, organized by the Tonalist collector William T. Evans, along with a group of other major collectors, including Charles Freer and Alexander Humphreys (de Kay probably advised in some capacity), was a bid to once and for all demonstrate the worth of the American Tonalist "School." One hundred American paintings—leading with works by La Farge, Whistler, Inness, John Henry Twachtman, Frederick W. Kost, Wyant, and Martin—were presented along with a like number of European paintings, mostly French, with some English and Dutch works. By all reports, through all the squabbles and the insuperable issues surrounding the selection process of such a quixotic adventure in boosterism, the American art world seems to have been genuinely surprised—and delighted—by the head-to-head competition between national schools.



COMPARATIVE EXHIBITION
OF
NATIVE AND FOREIGN
ART

1904

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE
SOCIETY OF ART COLLECTORS

AT THE GALLERIES OF
THE AMERICAN FINE ARTS SOCIETY
215 WEST FIFTY-SEVENTH STREET
NEW YORK

Fig. 8.4. Cover of the catalogue for the Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art, 1904.

De Kay had been railing against well-to-do American collectors of European art for decades, and the exhibition proved his main chance to make his case for the relative worth of the Americans, notwithstanding the obvious self-serving nature of an exhibition selected from the holdings of the major American art collectors. The organizers gave themselves a one-hundred-year leeway in terms of selection of works, which rather skewed the issue of comparing contemporary schools. Nine years later, Arthur B. Davies would undertake a similar exhibition with his Armory Show of 1913, the critical difference being that Davies conceived the Armory show as a forward-leaning snapshot of modernist developments on either side of the Atlantic. Controversies aside, de Kay was pleased with the results of the Comparative Exhibition. "And the increased numbers visiting the galleries seem to be warrant for believing that the self-assertion in hanging modern French and Dutch masters pell-mell with American is not resented by the picture-loving public. Yesterday some 1,500 persons visited the galleries notwithstanding the snowfall."[9]

Given that the majority of the lenders to the show were collectors of Tonalism, the style clearly provided the lingua franca. De Kay always used the term "colorist" to refer to the American Tonalists, aptly placing them in the historically correct "colore" tradition of the Venetian Renaissance; nevertheless, he did use the term in reference to the French school in the Comparative Exhibition—"the French tonalists of the past generation."[10] Although figurative works were included, the landscapes, featuring Nocturnes by Whistler and seascapes by Homer, clearly offered the most useful comparisons in terms of progressive American painting. De Kay praised Corot's aptitude for "the effect of thin-leaved branches trembling against a faintly opaline sky. And yet the skies of Corot themselves are surpassed by those of Homer D. Martin and Alexander Wyant, and certainly neither he, nor Rousseau, nor Daubigny was master of that rich loveliness of color we find in the 'Adirondack Scenery' and the 'Old Church in Normandy' by Martin. . . ." After lauding Diaz and Monticelli, "subject to the gray skies

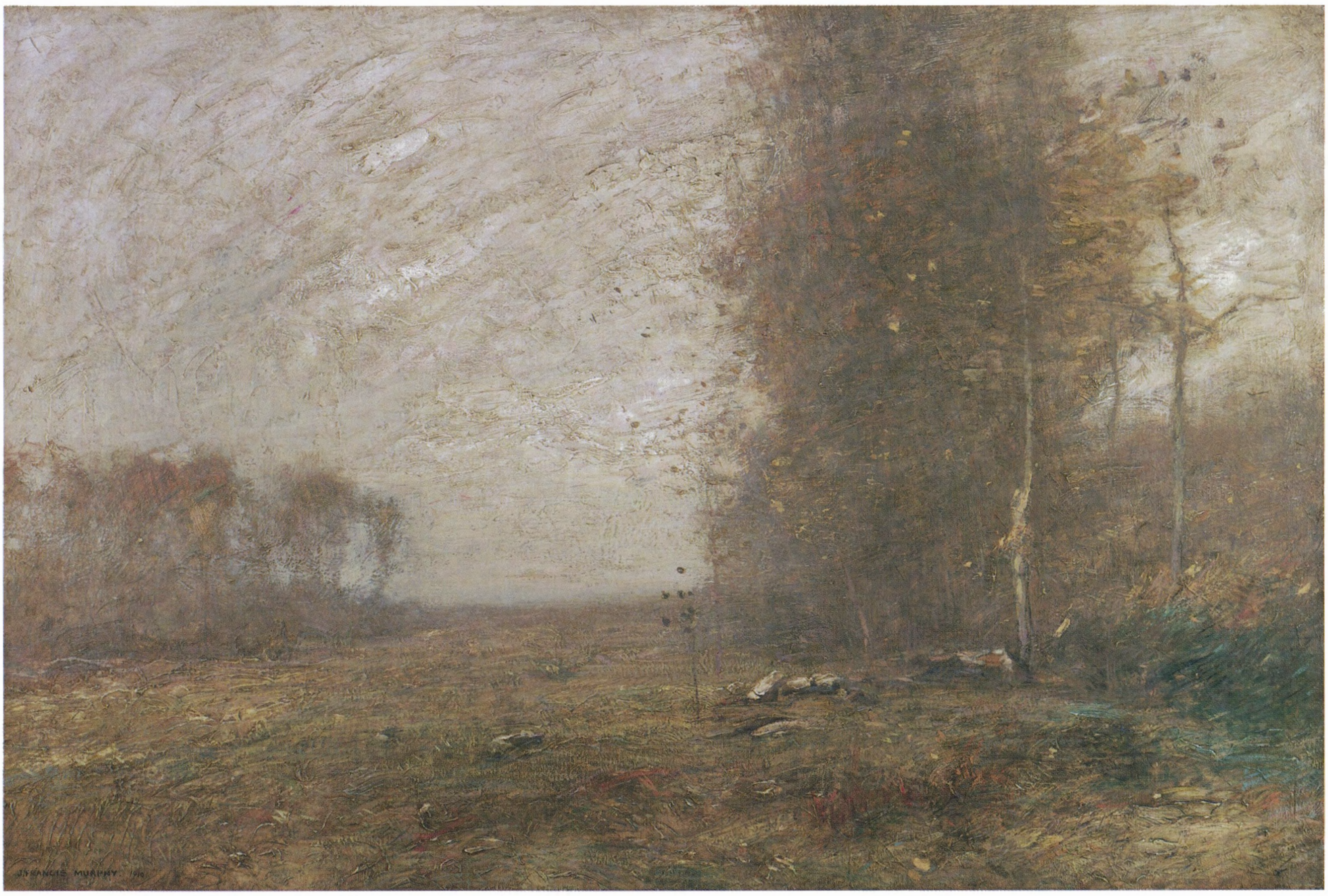


Fig. 8.5. J. Francis Murphy, *Summer Afternoon*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

and lighter tones of France, evolving landscapes of great tonal richness . . . and the robust brush of Jules Dupre," de Kay calls the Americans "much more subtle colorists." Comparing Boudin, Harpignies, Jongkind, Renoir, Sisley, Monet, and Troyon with Americans Inness, Ranger, La Farge, Tryon, Wyant, Murphy, Dewey, Kost, Davis, and Davies, de Kay finds the Americans, on a one-to-one comparison, hold up well and "seem to show a bigger, statelier quality than the Frenchman."

J. Francis Murphy's *Summer Afternoon* of 1910 (fig. 8.5), painted six years after the Comparative Exhibition, is a prime example of the expressive and "statelier" quality de Kay had promoted so avidly during the first decade of the new century. De Kay praises his longstanding favorite, Albert Pinkham Ryder: "His color is more varied and delicate than that of Delacroix, Diaz, and Monticelli." In a final burst of pride, de Kay gives vent to his frustrations of a quarter-century standing. "It seems necessary that in order to overcome the prejudice of education and tradition the American artist must always take the lead and force the world to give him his rightful place. The Comparative Exhibition in many ways is the most epoch-making show of fine arts the country has ever had, and its consequences are likely to be far-reaching . . . for Americans who have been overcome by the admirable things that meet them on a visit to Europe have been blind to what their own land produces, as fine as and in many cases finer than the products of European hands."[11]

Other critics of the time were quick to follow de Kay's lead. The artist and writer Ernest Knaufft noted that in the Comparative Exhibition the core comparison to be found was between the French school, mostly Barbizon landscapes, and "the American paintings . . . what are called 'tonal' pictures. Landscapes predominated; storytelling pictures were totally absent. Expression in color was the keynote of the exhibition." This reveals much about how Evans, his fellow collectors and Lotos Club members, and probably de Kay conceived the exhibition: the Lotos Club had been doing similar comparative exhibitions for years. The ten Whistlers were hung together, displaying the artist's "beauty of color" and "color symphony" composed by a careful grouping of his paintings. Knaufft declared, "Self-reliance as to method, or technique, absolute independence of academic art, and yet decisive attainment in expression marked the American work." In this line, the critic singled out George Fuller and Homer Martin, and particularly John La Farge's *Paradise Valley*, painted almost thirty-five years before (see fig. 1.19), as an avatar of American achievement in landscape. "At that period, such exquisite shell-like grays, made of violet, wild-rose pink, and jonquil yellow, were quite absent in the shadow portions of most European and American landscapes. The picture is very near perfection." The inclusion of *Paradise Valley* by the astute collecting circles around Evans suggests that La Farge's early landscape work of the 1860s was well understood at the time as being the embodiment of the Tonalist movement, then at its height. Hunt, too, was signaled out for his pioneering role in teaching Americans to appreciate Barbizon landscapes. A group of Inness's works was praised by Knaufft for their "rare certitude. In the 'Wood Gatherers' there is an emerald tone, luminous and golden, that the Frenchmen rarely attain." The reviewer also cites the excellence of Wyant, Tryon, Minor, Ranger, Hassam, Murphy, Twachtman, and Kost "that allowed them to hold their own with Sisley and Monet."[12]

The well-respected art critic Leila Mechlin, in a 1905 review in *Appleton's Magazine* titled "A Vindication of American Art," gave the Comparative Exhibition high marks. "In every respect the comparison was made with manifest fairness; the best was matched with the best; each group was thoroughly representative, and every canvas was placed to the utmost advantage. . . . There were, for example, in close proximity on one wall a Corot, a Wyant, a Daubigny, and a Murphy which were not unlike in quality of tone, and which measured well up to the same standard. There was, strange as it may seem, a Blakelock very similar in warm, luscious color to a noteworthy Monticelli, and a Gedney Bunce comparable with a representative canvas by Turner. . . . Looking back over the native section it was the subtlety of Whistler, the force of Homer, the versatility of La Farge, the restraint of Martin, the veracity of Inness, and the sentiment of Fuller which became impressive. These distinguishing characteristics are the component parts of what today is reckoned as the American School of art." The reviewer judged that the French (including figurative works) "excelled in pictorial effect; they were directly the more alluring and impressive. But in qualities of truth and feeling our own and the Dutch painters were richer and more profound. . . . In landscape transcription, however, they (the Americans) stood preeminent. Masterly as were the works of the Barbizon painters, beside the American canvases they seemed superficial."

In closing, Mechlin elucidated what she and her generation considered the essential qualities of the American school. "A picture, if it be a great work of art, must not merely reproduce nature, but rather sympathetically interpret it. It must have more than a superficial significance, and a charm more potent than the sum of its virtues. And this, it would seem, our native painters have realized. Their works have a ring of genuineness, an appearance of truth; and have been painted apparently for art's sake with sincere emotion, tempered by sound ideals and good judgment. They are big in motive and true in feeling. This the Comparative Exhibition most admirably set forth . . . and won for itself the right to the title 'epoch-making.'"[13] All the essentials of a native art—art that expresses deep feeling—espoused by George Inness as far back as 1878 are enumerated by Mechlin; she highlights Emerson's notions of self-reliance and individualism, and, of course, Whistler's art for art's sake.

The galvanizing charge of American self-worth engendered by the 1904 Comparative Exhibition cannot be overstated; it stamped the minds of the fin-de-siècle generation of artists, collectors, and critics with a new confidence. It certainly gave added momentum to the precipitous price rise for Tonalist landscapes in the following decade. Something of the enthusiasm of the moment is caught in a letter to the *New York Times* written by the old-master specialist Louis R. Ehrich, who wrote of the Comparative Exhibition: "I am bold enough to state that in my judgment the American landscape school of art is the greatest pure landscape school that ever existed. Time, I feel sure, will bear me out."[14] Four years later in 1908, Christian Brinton, writing in *The Century Magazine*, noted the impact of the Comparative Exhibition. "At last the casual visitor as well as the connoisseur was able to see what American artists had accomplished and what the future logically held in promise. The exhibition was immediately followed by a greatly increased demand for American pictures, and it would be safe to add that, as far as general appreciation goes, no single event has done more for placing native paintings on a sound basis than was achieved by this discreet juxtaposition of some two hundred admirable canvases."

Brinton dated from the close of the exhibition the rise in demand for American pictures among wealthy collectors and museums, and the endowment of museums with funds for the purchase of American art, noting, among others, the Temple Trust fund in Philadelphia and the Hearn Fund for the purchase of paintings by modern American artists at the Metropolitan Museum.[15] Even in 1927, dealer William Macbeth, in the thirty-fifth anniversary edition of his gallery publication *Art Notes*, judged the Comparative Exhibition an "event of outstanding importance. . . . It was hailed as the finest collection ever assembled in this country and the critics gave column after column to a discussion of its merits . . . The exhibition had a tremendous effect in awakening public interest in the work of home talent, an effect which has been cumulative over the years that have followed."[16] From 1904 to 1913—what in retrospect seems but a brief moment—the "cultural cringe" in American art was banished.

The excitement and national pride instilled by the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition and the Comparative Exhibition of 1904 begs the question: how could Tonalism as a style and movement, so dominant in the first decade of the century, suffer such a collapse by the late 1920s with the onset of the Great Depression, as to be virtually lost from public consciousness for fifty years? The answer—and it is an extraordinary paradox—is that Tonalism to a degree unequaled before or since, had become so deeply embedded in the American scene, its life and culture, as to be nearly invisible to succeeding generations, or at least its internal dynamic became less easy to discern. In some circles, Tonalism was so completely identified with the Aesthetic movement and its decorative high-minded Transcendentalist ethos, that when the turn-of-the-century establishment—and its value system—fell from grace during the Depression, Tonalism fell, too. Part of the paradox involves the resurgence after the Armory Show of 1913, and especially after the end of World War I, of a renewed Anglo-European snobbism, certainly among the intelligentsia, and its penchant for modernist "isms" that cast a shadow of parochialism over Tonalism and recast the movement as backward-looking rather than innovative. Anything before 1913 became suspect, if not simply passé.

Even in its heyday, to the generation of artists, patrons, and critics born after 1865, the Tonalist aesthetic was so ubiquitous it formed a nearly unremarkable cornerstone of America's expanding cultural hegemony. For those coming of age professionally and otherwise in the late 1880s and 1890s, Inness, Wyant, Martin, Whistler, and their younger followers formed a presiding artistic establishment: the tradition on which one is weaned and which one modifies or rejects into maturity. Of course no style or movement lasts forever, and by the 1920s Tonalism had naturally lost its original energy and creative spark as its progenitors faded from the scene. But Tonalism's formal resources, its spiritual underpinnings rooted in nature and the tradition of Emerson and Thoreau, remained a vital force. Like the sibilant energies of the natural world it embodied, it underwent its own metamorphosis, captivating successive generations of artists.

Something of this paradox can be explained by the reaction, or lack of reaction, in 1900 to the death of the great Hudson River School painter Frederic Church. Charles de Kay reviewed a retrospective of Church's sprawling detailed landscapes at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and graciously reminisced about the artist's glory days and his great patrons. When de Kay was a boy of thirteen or fourteen, his father had taken him to the home of one of Church's patrons, William Tilden Blodgett, to view the artist's majestic *Heart of the Andes*, and "with reverential awe he looked at the canvas. He can also recall Mr. Blodgett's warm and enthusiastic extolling of Mr. Church's work, and how he came away impressed with the idea that there was only one landscape artist in the world, and that his name was Church." De Kay writes appreciatively if with somewhat chagrined condescension about Church, noting his formative role (along with Gifford, Kennsett, Cropsey, and Bierstadt—followers of Durand and Cole) and that of his Hudson River School colleagues in the development of American landscape painting. "Crude as some of his work now seems, and thin or lurid as his color, he was unquestionably a painter of ability and of imagination . . . and his works remain his monument. He played well his part, and American art owes him a debt of gratitude. He is not to be compared with any of the great trio that succeeded him—Inness, Wyant, or Martin, and there are twenty American landscapists of the present day whose works in technique, color, composition, and truthfulness far surpass any that he ever painted."[17]

Here, on the cusp of the Tonalist generation's assumption of establishment status, was the fading light of the Hudson River School generation, artists who would also suffer precipitous demise and a long cold winter until they were disinterred in the early 1960s. The sympathetic disdain displayed by de Kay toward Church and the Hudson River School would, by the 1930s, be visited in turn on the Tonalists—the radicals of the late 1870s—by another generation of critics.

The Apotheosis of Tonalism: A Style for an Era

By 1910, the modernist critic Sadakichi Hartmann, who partnered with Alfred Stieglitz in many publishing ventures, could reflect back on the previous decade and the underlying malaise and uncertainty that characterized his times. "The age, at least in the upper intellectual strata, has become very skeptical. We are not concerned so much about divinities and our future state as about ourselves in the present. Religion no longer furnishes the emotional staff on which we may lean on our pilgrimage of life, and yet we need some spiritual support, some science for the soul, and we may look about for something that may mystify us and lift us above the prose of every-day existence."[18] Hartmann found that the Tonalist aesthetic offered "some science for the soul"—a means of probing and elucidating the mysterious ambiguities of modern life—and an art as perishable as friable pastel on toned paper, and as suggestive as memory itself. This was a grandly Proustian exercise, as noted in chapter 7, hardly confined to the European avant-garde; the Tonalists had been exploring such themes for decades, ever hopeful of capturing on canvas the fugitive moment.

In this and similar ways, the Tonalist aesthetic had so permeated the cultural fabric that by 1910 Hartmann could describe it as providing a kind of unconscious scrim and a seamless backdrop for a broad range of artistic and human endeavors. "Grey is the colour of modern life. . . . The modern painter uses a more limited scale of colour, and the tendency is toward grey. Man's garb is monotone, and the life in large cities devoid of the rich colour-bursts of medieval life. . . . We take delight to-day in subtler gradations, in semi and quarter tones, the losing of forms in mystic shadows, a restless, suggestive technique of mobile touches, nervous sparkles, of delicate broken tints that show a hundred differentiations. And this over-sensitiveness and fastidious objection to strong contrast, this love for the externals of technique, raising brushwork to a higher pedestal than the idea, has much to do with the exclusiveness of modern painting and the keener appreciation for monochrome."[19]

Nor was Hartmann alone in distinguishing Tonalism as the style that characterized the age and the best in the creative arts. Discussion of Tonalism as a peculiarly American aesthetic was entering the public arena through reviews, articles, and finally histories of art. As far back as 1893, the prolific art writer John Van Dyke had expounded on tone and Tonalism in his book *Art for Art's Sake*, praising the aptness and beauty of tone used in contemporary American painting. Van Dyke, a professor of art history at Rutgers University, wrote for *The Century Magazine* from 1884 to 1904. In 1889, a biographer of George Inness, Alfred Trumble, had started a monthly art magazine, *The Collector*, which championed Inness and the Tonalists. In 1898–99, *The Collector* ran a series of articles on tonality, noting, "Tone is of paramount importance in painting as in music. American artists strive for tone, the art-lover looks for it, and the critic appreciates it. Its presence excites the keenest pleasure and liveliest interest in artists and connoisseur [*sic*], and to the poet-mind it brings profound and lasting emotions. The future of art in America is the future of the tonal picture. He who is master of tone is master of us all."[20]

By 1901, a *New York Times* review of a New York Water Color Club exhibition would contrast the Americans with their British colleagues, pointing out the American tendency "to soft tones, rich, low notes, harmonies, and tonality," as opposed to the linear style and narrative character of the British.[21] American photographers were so conversant with the term Tonalist by 1905 that it required no elaboration when employed in technical journals.[22] In 1905, painter Samuel Isham came out with his long-anticipated and influential history of American art, confirming the Tonalists as the leading school of landscape artists in America. In the decade after 1900, such critics as Royal Cortissoz, Sadakichi Hartmann, Frank Jewett Mather, and Charles Caffin—following in the footsteps of Charles de Kay—all acknowledged Tonalism and the major Tonalist artists (the 1840–1865 generation) as the most progressive forces within American art.

Clara Ruge, writing in *The International Studio* in 1905, in an article titled "The Tonal School of America," claimed Tonalism as a national school, superseding the Hudson River School, and "destined to leave a mark in the history of art." Ruge definitively grounded the style not so much in its visual quality, but based on Inness's assertion that art must awaken an emotion and that the force of that emotion is key to the greatness of art. Whether Ruge coined the term "Tonal School" or not, it subsequently took on a life of its own.[23] In 1906, a *Brush and Pencil* article on the Tonalist artist Franklin De Haven noted "a certain group of American landscape painters whom, for want of a better phrase, it is the fashion now to term the tonal school."[24] A year later, the artist and writer Ernest Knaufft, in trying to tease out the distinctive quality of American art, ventured of the American landscape painters ". . . a key is struck in their landscapes that seems to have different intervals than the conventional European key. In Eastern music is found a scale with quarter tones. May it not be that American landscape will go so far in delicacy of modulation that we shall add quarter tones to our color scale?"[25]

In 1908, Charles Caffin offered perhaps the best short summary of Tonalist technique in, of all places, his book *A Child's Guide to Pictures*. "When we speak of a picture having tonal qualities, we mean that the artist has so combined the related darks and lights and the related coolness and warmth of his colors that he has produced a harmony, threaded through and through with a suggestion of rhythm or vibration. And the vibration will be most felt when the suggestion of atmosphere pervades the picture."[26] Caffin not only clarifies Birge Harrison's more technical discussion of the refraction and vibration of tones in Harrison's 1909 book *Landscape Painting*, but also confirms the fundamental shift in outlook among modern artists of his generation. This generation, according to Caffin, no longer cared to analyze and compose pictorial space in terms of chiaroscuro (concentrating on stark contrasts of light and shadow), but, following the lead of Velásquez and Vermeer, were drawn to compositional strategies emphasizing lighter and darker values, and thus balancing and harmonizing forms as flat color planes on canvas. For Caffin, Whistler and the Tonalists were so clearly the cutting edge of the modernist cause as to be described as such—explicitly and matter-of-factually so, in a book written for children.

By 1909, Charles de Kay acknowledged the use of the term "tonal school" in critical jargon, but questioned its application to the varied landscapes at the National Academy of Design's exhibition that year, as well as whether the percentage of paintings displaying pronounced "tonality" constituted the basis of a school.[27] De Kay had used the term "colorist" for more than twenty years to describe Tonalism and so might well have found "Tonalism" uncongenial to his historically correct terminology. His ambivalence, precisely around the time that the Tonalist dominance in the exhibitions was being diluted by the impact of new styles—the vigorous American realism of George Bellows, Edward Redfield, and Ben Foster's late expressive canvases, in addition to the Post-Impressionist European modes—may explain the difficulties of such critical terminology in taking firmer hold in the public mind. On the other hand, in photography circles the term seems to have been widely used; in 1910 Sadakichi Hartmann employed the term in reference to the early work of Alfred Stieglitz, "before he became a fanatic champion of the tonal school," in his book, *Landscape and Figure Composition*.[28] In 1911, in a review of paintings by Arthur Hoeber, de Kay described the artist's work as "allied to what we call in the slang of criticism the 'tonal' school."[29]

As late as 1916, with the Armory Show of 1913 a recent memory, Ralcy Husted Bell made the strongest case yet for the Tonalists, under the leadership of Henry Ward Ranger, as a distinct national school of artists with a lineage going back forty years to the 1870s, and with a pedigree in the old master painters and the tradition of the great Venetian painters of the Renaissance, especially the use of colored glazes, which was an essential tool in the Tonalist repertoire. Bell also noted the underlying abstract energy of Tonalism in its use of decorative patterning: "All those who are familiar with the finest examples of the Tonal School must be impressed with their sensuous swing and play of colour, which are wedded to such delightful designs and pleasing patterns that they neither seem like designs nor yet suggest patterns. So agreeably are all the parts connected, that they are seen only together: fused in a nice relation to the whole. . . . These noble specimens disclose a mastery of the relations which assemble and unify all the components of a picture into a single broad harmony. . . . Better than the votaries of any other school known to me, the Tonalist catches the laughter of shimmering light, and transmutes it into pictorial joy; he speaks admirably the old mother-tongue of cloud, tree, pool, and stone; he interprets the spring; he is summer's scribe, page to the majesty of autumn, and priest to the whole round year. With a simple palette, and as if by magic, he expresses breadth, teasing transparency, mysterious distances, the illusion of luminosity—in a word, the drama of air, light, and colour. Taken all in all, his pictures challenge, please, and convince. As a last refinement, he permeates them with his own individuality, and thus may he be called a creator."[30]

Following the lead of Isham in 1905 and Caffin (*The Story of American Painting*, 1907), art historians began to give the term "Tonalism" wider currency. *The Study of Modern Painting* by Margaret Steele Anderson, published in 1914, differentiates between modern landscape painters and cites the "Tonalists" as "Ranger, Dearth, Dessar, Sartain, Keith, and Ballard-Williams, painters in whose work there is one color that is dominant, and in whom, moreover, we see a following of tradition and a sense of the pictorial—that is, of the picture as a picture, not as a decoration nor as an exhibition of skill, nor as the mere literal transcript of some physical aspect of nature."[31] Julia De Forest, in her book *A Short History of Art*, published in 1921 (the volume was largely rewritten by Charles Caffin and most likely reflects his understanding of Tonalism), describes Tonalism as a modern landscape movement initiated by George Inness. "A picture is said to be tonal or based on tonality when the artist has adopted some one hue of colour or a contrast of two as his main motive, and then repeats the hue or hues in a variety of tones, introducing also other hues or colour sparingly and modulating their tones in subordination to the main theme. This result is a harmony of tonal relations, which may or may not reproduce the actual hues of the landscape. As a rule it does not, and represents a transposition of nature's hues into a more or less arbitrary scheme of colour. . . . The pictorial motive being uppermost, the tonalist is usually very careful to make his composition decorative. Moreover, the principle lends itself readily to poetic expression."[32]

The Strange Case of Mr. Whistler's Disappearance

By the second decade of the twentieth century and the early 1920s, the Tonalist landscape had achieved such iconic status that Inness, Wyant, Martin, Whistler, Ryder, Blakelock, Murphy, and Tryon were considered old masters of what by then was being called by crirics the "American School," and concurrently, their early radicalism became less visible. Partly this was simply because of the aging of the Tonalist movement, partly because of the confusion with the Aesthetic movement and the far-reaching impact of James McNeill Whistler after 1900. The Aesthetic movement in America, especially in the decorative arts, reached it peak in the decade of 1875 to 1885, later superseded by the Arts and Crafts movement. But the Aesthetic movement's doctrine of art for art's sake and bringing art, as well as good taste, into all aspects of life continued on into the first decade of the twentieth century, merging with the cult of Whistler, which had reached its zenith by 1905, his immortal genius proclaimed widely upon his death in 1903, and further confirmed in many minds by a memorial exhibition in Boston in 1904 (see fig. 3.78). More remarkably still, Whistler's aesthetic stance, initially assailed in some conservative circles of the 1880s as alien, effeminate, and effete, had been transformed into an all-American attitude toward art, healthy, wholesomely masculine, and vigorous, very much suiting the reformist politics and social Darwinism of President Theodore Roosevelt. This is doubly ironic in light of Tonalism's fall, when, in the Depression-ridden 1930s, Tonalist art and the cult of Whistler was equated with the effete aestheticism of a moribund, careless, and selfish ruling class, by then down on its heels and utterly dismissed.

Tonalism's identification with Whistler, especially in its early manifestation of Aesthetic Tonalism, is another reason for its invisibility to later generations. By 1900 Whistler's late, expressive, tenebrous style had branded the age: his monocle, his white lock of hair, his dandy dress and slender bamboo cane were caricatured everywhere in the press at the turn of the century. He was one of the first great celebrity-culture figures who came to dominate the twentieth century (fig. 8.6). By the time of his death in 1903, Whistler had a reputation as an aggressive scrapper, and his appreciation for feminine beauty had long overcome any lingering questions about his masculinity, or the wholesomeness of his art. His death only solidified his near-mythic status, and ultimately the supremacy of his vision—especially the Symbolist ambiguity in his late work—to see into the heart of things. Whistler and modernism were, for many young artists, synonymous. This was as true in New York as it was in London and Paris where Whistler fundamentally influenced the Nabis (a group of avant-garde French painters who took their cue from Gauguin and Whistler's synthetic and decorative style), the most prominent being Bonnard and Vuillard, while Degas and Monet from the 1890s on developed tonal styles along Whistlerian lines. Even in the art backwater of Barcelona, where a struggling young artist, Pablo Picasso, was in search of a distinctive style, Whistler was an unavoidable influence. Picasso was exposed to reproductions of Whistler's work as early as 1895; Whistler (and Velásquez) remained an influence on the young Spaniard's work for decades, in particular, on his Blue Period.

It is little wonder then that in 1910 arts writer Sadakichi Hartmann placed Whistler at the epicenter of the culture, his deracinated art epitomizing the mystery and ambiguity of urban existence. It was this diffused and spiritualizing Whistlerian light, the hints and ambiguities of amorphous and symbolic form, that transfixed two generations. Thus, when seeking the reasons for Tonalism's great disappearing act, it is Whistler's disappearing act that we must also consider. The almost total exclusion of Whistler in the 1930s by modernist guru and first director of the Museum of Modern Art, Alfred H. Barr, as a significant part of the development of modernism explains much; Barr drew yet another curtain of fuliginous gloom across the history of modernism by eliminating Whistler's essential role (see fig. 8.149, *Cover of Alfred Barr's Cubism and Abstract Art*). In fact, Whistler's embodied etherealities permeated his age precisely because they raised more questions than they answered: the haunting memory-burdened and existential questions that, for the generation on the verge of the World War I killing fields, seemed to infuse every waking moment with anxiety.

This feeling of displacement also found expression in the Symbolist novels of Joseph Conrad and Henry James, whose characters, often enveloped in flickering shadows, are hard to fully grasp, while their motivations remain as shifting and unclear as their turbid personalities. This, too, constituted Hartmann's penumbral fault line where a jittery present clashes with an uncertain future, and why Hartmann in 1910 so readily identified Whistler with this era. Such anxieties, endemic in a fast-changing society, which threatened to overwhelm the individual, were like catnip to the modernist cause, a camp ideologically committed to pitting the gift of individual artistic insight against the blindness of industrial sameness and social convention. Here, too, Whistler was a paragon; he had set the mold as far back as the 1860s. Avant-garde interests were by definition promoted by a cadre of enlightened avatars whose raison d'être was to confound the staid values of the bourgeois—one of Whistler's specialties. Nor should it be forgotten, as was discussed in chapter seven, Whistler, along with Alexander Harrison, provided the model for Proust's character, Elstir, in *Remembrance of Things Past*, the most prominent and fully fleshed out of all the writer's fictional artists. The art and life of Whistler—Harrison was a near alter-ego for the young author—fundamentally influenced Proust's deeply subjective and memory-infused descriptions of landscape. Proust's homage to Whistler included not only the sounding of Elstir's name in French, but explicit references to the artist's style and signature, as in this description of the sea from a hotel window in Balbec. "And sometimes to a sky and sea uniformly grey a touch of pink would be added with an exquisite delicacy, while a little butterfly that had gone to sleep at the foot of the window seemed to be appending with its wings at the corner of this 'Harmony in Grey and Pink' in the Whistler manner the favourite signature of the Chelsea master."[33] Just as Whistler's and Harrison's reputations began to fade around 1910—not without a little poetic justice—their aesthetic embodiment gathered force and long-term staying power in the pages of Proust's eight-volume novel published between 1913 and 1927.

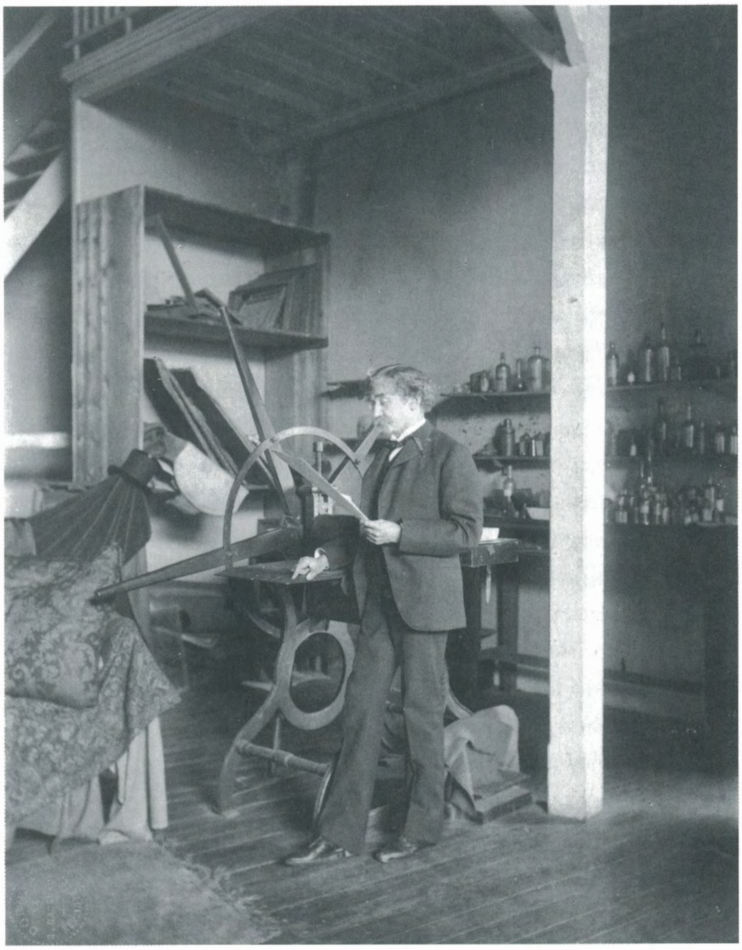


Fig. 8.6. Photograph of James McNeill Whistler in his studio, 86 rue Notre Dame des Champs, Paris, 1899. Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Gift of the estate of Charles Lang Freer.

But Proust was far from the first writer to model a fictional character on Whistler. None other than Charles de Kay, in his 1878 novel *The Bohemian: A Tragedy of Modern Life*, had set the mold for an insouciant Whistlerian insurgency on American shores. De Kay's main character—and alter ego—Harpalion Bagger is a direct takeoff on Whistler, who, along with his poet and artist followers, provided the template in American cultural circles for a group of anti-bourgeois radicals known as the Expressionists. "He [Harpalion, the Symbolist poet and Whistler stand-in] had long mourned the absence in New York of a Quartier Latin. The Expressionists were to form his Quartier Latin. Bohemians in New York were so few or so scattered that their existence was sometime denied. The Expressionists were to afford the needed element. Bohemians wore velvet jackets, loose cravats, and slouch hats, sang songs in derision of staid burgesses and drank confusion to the Philistine in a smoky restaurant. All these things, or some of them, should be done by the Expressionists, even if it were hard to find in New York any one class of people more than another, upon which the odious term *bourgeois* could fasten." De Kay describes Harpalion in terms that neatly sum up the author's outlook over his forty-odd years as a poet and critic: "Harpalion was a realization of what a poet should be, full of beautiful words and images, a denouncer in a vague way, to be sure, of the shams of the world, and a believer in a life founded upon sentiments and personal worth, not on station or worth."[34]

Sentiment, not sentimentality, remained de Kay's cri de coeur throughout his career. By returning Whistler to his homeland (in a fictional setting), de Kay set the foundation for a hybrid bohemian counter-culture (although sorely lacking a bourgeois class to target) in late 1870s New York, and a modernist agenda that as a critic and cultural provocateur he would pursue with a vengeance throughout his long career. In a very real sense, de Kay, with the help of his many Gilder circle and Century Club confederates, provided New York and American cultural circles with a Whistlerian alter ego, both serving the "master"—as his Whistlerian character Harpalion was called by the Expressionists—in faraway London, and promoting Whistler's modernist agenda in word and deed. As a poet, too, de Kay was identified with Swinbourne, Morris, and Browning, all very much in Whistler's aesthetic camp.[35] De Kay's break with the older poets like Whittier, Bryant, and Longfellow, by drawing on radical European sources of inspiration, mirrors the Tonalists' break with the Hudson River School in their adoption of expressive painterly techniques from Paris and Munich.

Whistler's seminal role, abetted by de Kay, in America's early move toward modernism in the late 1870s would ultimately result in the embrace of pure abstraction by American artists. This was the result not only of Whistler's minimalist abstraction (inspired by Asian design) and its roots in Puritan iconoclasm, but of the Civil War, which only reinforced the trend toward non-narrative, non-figurative, and non-ideological art. European radicals during the fin-de-siècle era, lacking the trauma of civil war, were less taken with abstraction of any kind and more caught up with supercharging figurative art with psychosexual obsessions, Freudian or otherwise, to shock the bourgeois. This was something that landscape could not easily achieve, although Tonalist artist Thomas Dewing with his sensuous nudes, especially his pastels, certainly touched on themes of hidden desire.

World War I brought many upheavals but did not change this fundamental difference between American and European art. In Europe, la vie moderne was transformed by the war-to-end-all-wars, emerging from the stink of the trenches with a deepened malaise and committed ideological agendas, which even liberal and sympathetic American critics found overstuffed with false consciousness and suspect rhetoric, further reinforcing a traditional predisposition to narrative and figurative art.[36] Americans still preferred the fundamental abstraction and non-ideological character of landscape. World War I, like the American Civil War fifty years before, released a pall of horror, disgust, and dismissive irony that forever changed the lives of yet another generation of Americans and Europeans, but it also resulted in a divergence—or reinforced an existing difference in direction—between American and European art: landscape remained the passionate focus of American artists, while figurative and narrative art was embraced by Europe's finest artists.

Being true to the creative despair of modernism, committed modernists in both America and Europe dismissed their bourgeois progenitors, along with the artists of 1880–1910—Whistler in particular—the one-time champions of the new and art for art's sake as reactionary has-beens. The anti-war, anti-establishment rhetoric of the prewar years was in turn transformed into revolutionary doctrines that threatened to overturn the established order, if not destroy it. On an international level, the prewar exaltation of individual feeling was replaced by the ardor of collectivist ideas. And so Whistler was replaced by Picasso (who hated pure abstraction because he felt it tended toward the decorative) and Matisse, and the "colore" tradition by the "designo" tradition (color was freed from the imposition of form), landscape by figurative art, and the impulse to abstraction, especially in Europe, by a combination of psychosexual and ideological narratives. In America between the wars, organic and even pure abstraction was kept alive in the Stieglitz circle; in Europe, abstraction, for all Wassily Kandinsky's spiritualizing notions, tended to the formal and geometric in the work of Piet Mondrian and Paul Klee. For the more aesthetically minded in America in the decades after the 1913 Armory Show, the new art was not so shocking as it demonstrated a return to narrative shibboleths, mostly in bad taste and shoddy execution.

As the Tonalist generation had been radicalized by the Civil War, so modern artists in Europe, and to a lesser extent, in America, were radicalized by the unspeakable miseries of World War I. In both cases, war had produced profound changes and a writ of unintended consequences, one of which was the fading of Whistler's prewar star. Subsequently, the dismissal of Whistler in the 1930s by American critics and scholars obscured not only the importance of the Tonalist movement but also the true origins of modernism and pure abstraction in American art for another two generations. Whereas in post-World War I Europe, the emergence of pure abstraction outside the orbits of Kandinsky, Klee, and Mondrian tended to be sidelined, in America it gathered latent strength in the Stieglitz circle and the work of Milton Avery, to reappear full blown in the paintings of the Abstract Expressionists in late 1940s New York, who, knowingly or not, reclaimed Whistler's vital heritage of abstraction in all its decorative, Symbolist, and expressive glory. De Kay's Expressionists of the late 1870s finally had their day.

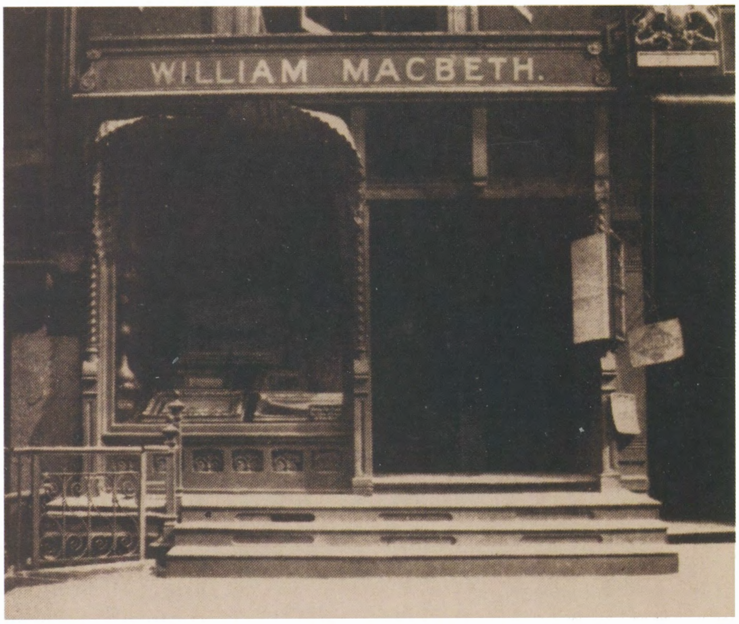
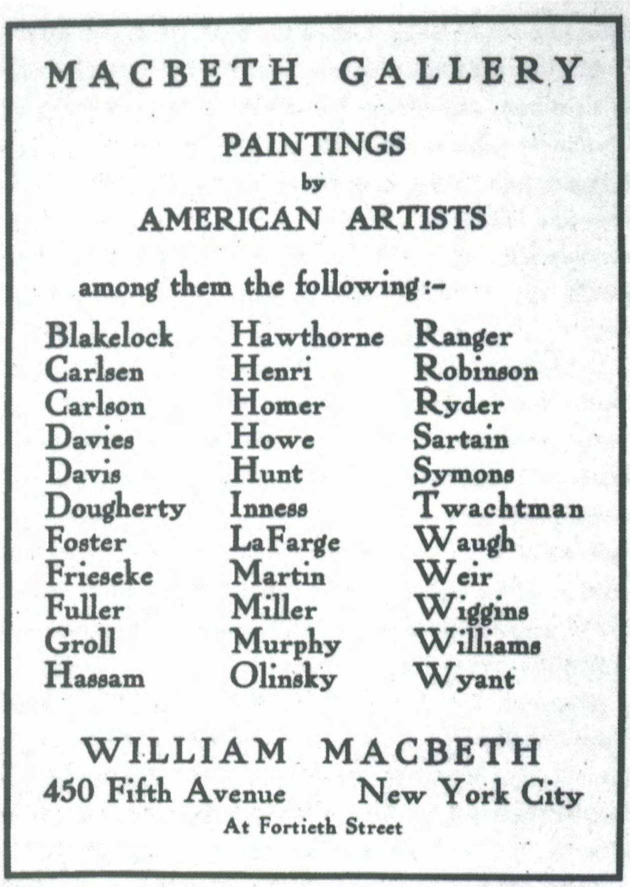


Fig. 8.7. Macbeth Gallery, c. 1896. Macbeth Gallery Records, 1838–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.



MACBETH GALLERY

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by
AMERICAN ARTISTS

among them the following:-

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Foster
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Fuller
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Hassam
Hawthorne
Henri
Homer
Howe
Hunt
Inness
LaFarge
Martin
Miller
Murphy
Olinsky
Ranger
Robinson
Ryder
Sartain
Symons
Twachtman
Waugh
Weir
Wiggins
Williams
Wyant

WILLIAM MACBETH
450 Fifth Avenue New York City
At Fortieth Street

Fig. 8.8. Macbeth Gallery Artists List, undated.

The Growing Market for Tonalism at the Turn of the Century

In 1927 the dealer William Macbeth reminisced in his publication, *Art Notes*: "The opening of my gallery, near the old Hotel Brunswick, was a rash venture under the existing conditions, and disaster was freely predicted. There was, indeed, reason for gloomy views and I often wondered how I had courage to continue the hard fight. I had good friends among the artists who gladly lent their pictures for exhibiting, and though sales were not frequent, bare expenses were met until the tide turned and the small circle of buyers gradually grew wider." These thoughts give an idea of just how tough the market for American art was in 1892, when the Macbeth Gallery opened, and how much had changed since 1900 (figs. 8.7, 8.8).

Macbeth was the most prominent among the dealers to exploit the rising market for American art in the 1890s, even in face of the Depression headwinds that marked the middle years of the decade. When Macbeth announced his intentions to display and sell American artists, he flew in the face of the then near-unshakable belief in the cachet of European art. He stated in his first sales catalogue, "The work of American artists has never received the full share of appreciation that it deserves, and the time has come when an effort should be made to gain for it the favor of those who have hitherto purchased foreign pictures exclusively. As I shall exhibit only that which is thoroughly good and interesting, I hope to make this establishment known as *the* place where may be purchased the very best our artists can produce."[37]

By 1900, the Macbeth Gallery had expanded and moved up Fifth Avenue, becoming the epicenter of the American art trade, while encouraging the establishment of many more galleries both in New York and throughout the country. The 1890s had witnessed the transition of the art market from the exhibitions and societies run by artists, and the private sales preferred by artists, to the modern gallery system with its drawbacks as well as its many benefits to the individual artist. Charles de Kay offers a snapshot of this transition in an 1898 article for the *New York Times,* first noting the existing scarcity of dealers devoted to young American painters: "The attitude of the painter toward the professional dealer is somewhat the same as that of the writer toward the publisher. He resents the large profits of the middleman, hoping always by private sales from his studio or through the efforts of his friends, if not through the agency of the societies he controls, to eliminate the dealer and secure his profits. This may not be strictly wise, although eminently natural. The dealer can do much to sell American pictures if confidence is bestowed on him and his profits ungrudgingly conceded." Noting the good services of dealers Thomas B. Clarke, Daniel Cottier, and William Macbeth in promoting George Inness, Albert Pinkham Ryder, and Arthur B. Davies, de Kay further advocates the beneficial role of the dealer. "A seller of paintings who has convinced himself of the beauty and enduring value of an artist's work can do far more than an art critic to convince buyers of its worth, because, although the latter know that he has a financial interest in the sale, still he has the chance to expatiate at length on the good points of the artist in question and return to the topic again and again."[38]

Macbeth did more than just promote his artists; he sought to encourage and educate his collectors by trumpeting the investment value of American painting. Although Macbeth certainly sold to the very rich, the major collectors of his day—the "amateurs" as de Kay described the moneyed connoisseur—the majority of his sales were, for the most part, to upper middle-class professionals and the comfortably well-off. Connoisseurship and discrimination was another goal. Macbeth undertook to winnow out the also-rans and display only the very best American artists in his showrooms. The acuity of his eye is striking, although like other dealers Macbeth included a few commercial potboilers. In the early years, Alexander Wyant was a mainstay of Macbeth's sales (his first sale of an oil was a Wyant for $750 in 1892), along with smaller works, especially watercolors. Small intimate works like Wyant's *Sunset Hour,* circa 1885–90 (fig. 8.9), became much sought after by Macbeth's collectors.

Macbeth's first exhibitions formed a who's who of the finest Tonalist artists, including Leonard Ochtman, Henry Ward Ranger, J. Francis Murphy, Charles Warren Eaton, and Charles Harry Eaton. Watercolors like Charles Warren Eaton's *Rocks on the Shore,* circa 1895 (see fig. 4.38), provided affordable and original artworks for collectors of limited means. In time, Inness, Wyant, and Martin became reliable sources of income with the demand for work by these artists remaining steady until the Great Depression. Macbeth endeavored to provide art in a wide price range, from small drawings and etchings to watercolors and large oils. In this manner, young and beginning collectors could get their feet wet and later move on to more expensive purchases. Although Macbeth did sell some European art early on, especially in the difficult decade of the 1890s, by 1900 he was selling almost exclusively American art, benefiting from the upturn in the economy and rising prices for his American artists.

The price rise for Macbeth's Tonalists, especially his most expensive sellers—George Inness, Alexander Wyant, and Homer Dodge Martin—was dramatic. In 1896, an Inness sold for $1,000; in 1912 a smaller Inness sold for $2,500.[39] By 1906, artists like Wyant and Martin were in such short supply that Macbeth advised clients to put their names on a waiting list. In 1900, Macbeth grossed $22,318 and in 1901 he doubled the figure to $46,242. Macbeth's success was reflected in the growing number of other New York dealers. Between 1898 and 1906 the number of dealers doubled from twenty-three to forty-five, while the number of dealers selling American art had risen to eight in 1900: the American Art Association, S.P. Avery (Avery Art Galleries), Durand-Ruel, Louis Katz, Christian Klackner, Knoedler, Montross, and Hermann Wunderlich (Wunderlich & Co.). Less specialized dealers like Daniel Cottier and William Clausen were doing a brisk business in Tonalist artists such as Blakelock, Ryder, Charles Harold Davis, Charles Warren Eaton, and others. Cottier & Co. had been selling works by Ryder and William Gedney Bunce since the late 1870s. Across the country, from Boston and Philadelphia to Chicago, St. Louis, and San Francisco, scores of dealers opened to sell American paintings, many, if not most, promoted and sold Tonalist landscapes.

In addition to checklists for his exhibitions, Macbeth began a newsletter in 1896, *Art Notes,* in which he reported on art news in and around New York and offered his opinion about artists and collecting. *Art Notes,* published four times a year, provided the dealer with a way of keeping in touch with far-flung collectors, while advancing the American artists he favored. As early as 1897, Macbeth was touting the investment potential of the younger American artists. "Instead of bewailing the lost opportunities for purchasing, at trifling prices, pictures by Mauve, Corot, Daubigny, Rousseau, Millet, and other artists now famous, let them look about them for young artists of promise who are today repeating the struggles of great men of their days. They could in this way not only relieve many an anxiety but find opportunities for purchasing pictures that in a few years would be worth many times their cost. The man who does not want a picture until the fame of the artist so enhances its value that he cannot afford it, does not deserve a good picture and ought to confess that he does not know one when he sees it. Too many measure by dollars and not by quality."[40] Charles de Kay, too, was hardly immune to the blandishments of the marketplace, and in 1902 heartily cheered Macbeth's pioneering championship of American art in a *New York Times* editorial celebrating the gallery's tenth anniversary. "He was one of the first, perhaps the very first, to have sufficient confidence in our native art to devote himself

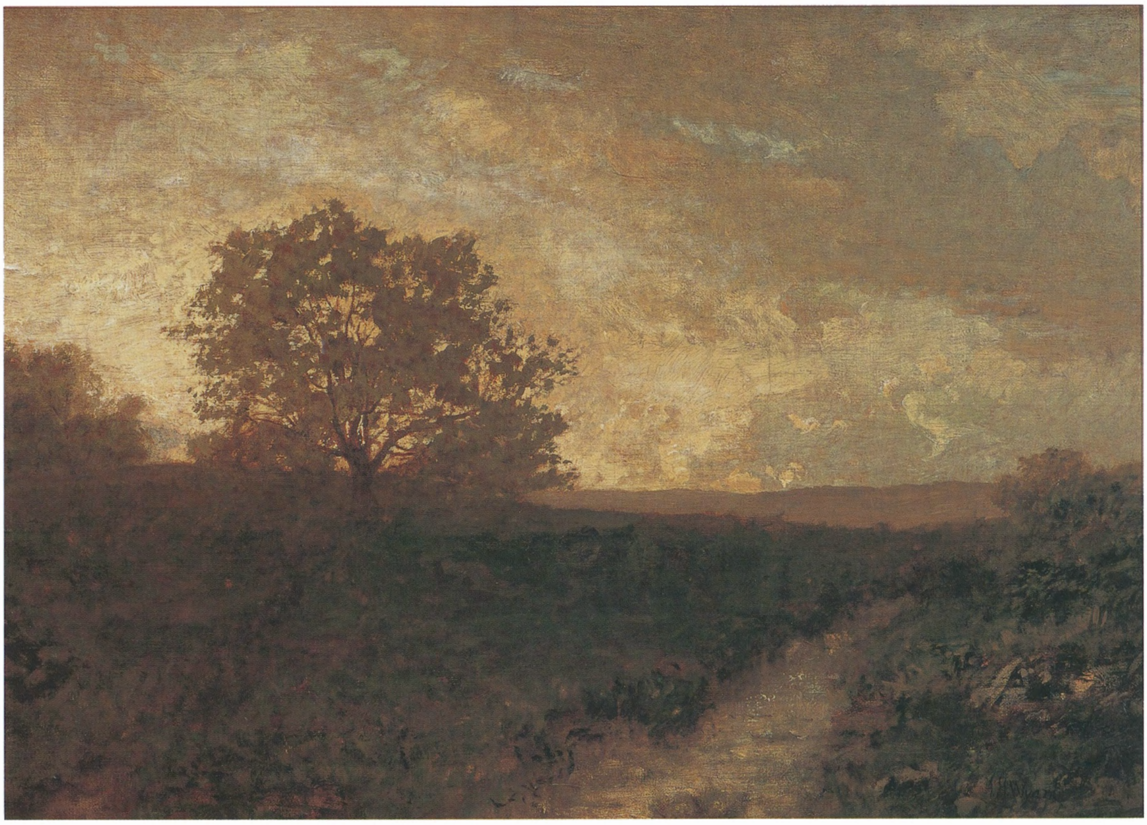


Fig. 8.9. Alexander Wyant, *Sunset Hour*, c. 1885–90. Oil on canvas, 15 x 20 in. Anonymous collection.

almost exclusively to its sale. Year by year Mr. William Macbeth has won friends among the picture buyers and the artists, and has had the satisfaction to see other dealers encouraged to take up American pictures, if not exclusively, at least with more hope than was the case before his efforts as an art dealer began, though still as an adjunct to the sale of foreign work. Especially have the colorists [Tonalists] found in Mr. Macbeth a sympathetic friend when no other dealer or art organization dared to countenance their eccentric pictures."[41]

Macbeth rode the wave of enthusiasm for the Tonalist landscape—accelerated after 1904 by the Comparative Exhibition, but included figurative and realist art as well, although they never became major sellers like the landscapes. Many of the great Homer Dodge Martin paintings passed through the sure hands of Macbeth, and Inness always figured in his record sales. Maurice Prendergast, Robert Henri, Charles Melville Dewey, William Lathrop, George Luks, and Charles Harold Davis all had their first showings at Macbeth. In 1908, Macbeth hosted the first exhibition of the realists led by Henri as "The Eight," and as Macbeth noted, "It was also their last, for there was little real coherence in the group."[42] Arthur B. Davies always sold well for Macbeth—the lion's share of sales going to one fervent admirer, Lillie P. Bliss, but Macbeth found Davies's selection of American artists for the 1913 Armory Show disappointing. "In the American section, I found a few new progressives who were perfectly sane [Macbeth described a score of the European works as "utterly absurd"], and I was made glad once more to find that they were given an inning. I found, as I expected, that many artists who have conferred distinction on the school of American art were not represented, but they have had no lack of other opportunities to display their work."[43] Prices and sales continued to rise right through the Armory Show of 1913, reaching a peak of sales in 1916, "the most profitable year our artists have ever had." With the conclusion of World War I, 1918 and 1919 proved "banner years" for Macbeth, followed by a five-year slump, which Macbeth partly blamed on decorators who "decided that that people were not to be permitted to hang pictures. Just how that decree came to be issued will probably never be known, but, it, in conjunction with falling markets, had a disastrous effect on our artists and their dealers for the better part of five bad seasons."[44] By all accounts, the art market improved markedly in 1925, and continued until the crash of 1929.

William A. Coffin (1855–1925)

One of the artists represented by the high-end New York gallery, Knoedler—which at the turn of the century sold mostly European works to wealthy collectors—was William A[nderson] Coffin (fig. 8.10), who, as director of fine arts at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo in 1901, organized perhaps the finest exhibition of American painting of that period. His own work has been hard to assess because much of it has been difficult to locate. Outside of Chase and La Farge, it is hard to think of another artist so deeply anchored in the art world of the day in terms of his multiple roles as arts writer, critic, administrator of major exhibitions, Society of American Arts insider and, later, participant on selection committees at the National Academy of Design after 1910. It is possible that his reputation as a landscape painter suffered from his multiple roles, although the respect he clearly enjoyed from his contemporaries does not support the case. His all-American credentials might also have been called into question; he spent almost five years of study in Paris with Léon Bonnat, with whom he remained close to the end of the French master's life, perhaps leaving Coffin open to criticism in some circles that he remained too academic, too French in his style.

When he returned to America in 1882, Coffin began exhibiting figurative and genre works but seems to have quickly changed to landscapes for which he always maintained he had greater affinity, later writing about his dramatic switch from academic figuration to landscape: "No transformation could be more complete; but it marks the studious and self-developing character of the artist learning the tendency of his sympathies and cultivating the field in which he finds the richest harvest of gratification."[45] Like fellow Tonalists J. Alden Weir, Birge Harrison, and Arthur Hoeber, all with strong academic training in Paris, Coffin gravitated to early attachments and the inspiration of home ground; he owned and maintained Pine Spring Farm in western Pennsylvania at Jennerstown. The countryside there fundamentally shaped his artistic persona.

The growing market for landscapes, and pressure from critics like Charles de Kay in the early 1880s made the adoption of landscapes a more profitable endeavor, and success came quickly for Coffin. A member of the Society of American Artists from 1886, Coffin won his first landscape prize, the second Hallgarten Prize, at the academy that same year and went on to win a bronze medal for one of his four landscapes exhibited at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1889 (see fig. 8.11); he subsequently won the Webb Prize for best landscape at the Society of American Artists annual exhibition in 1891. Such a run of prizes for landscape did not prevent Charles de Kay from a scathing attack on Coffin's 1891 prizewinning effort at the society. "Doubtless this honor has been awarded him in recognition of his services, which are and have been great. It could hardly have been meant as the society's stamp of approval. . . ." The better part of de Kay's review proceeds to enumerate those dozen landscapes more deserving of the prize, beginning with Charles Melville Dewey's *The Return of the Hayboats,* circa 1892 (see fig. 6.28), which displayed "the beauty of coloring and charm of workmanship which Mr. Coffin's landscape conspicuously lacks."[46] De Kay called Coffin's landscape formal and unimaginative. Such an attack on Coffin, in addition to the society's selection process for the prizes (Coffin had five landscapes in the 1891 society annual exhibition) was unprecedented, even for the feisty and opinionated de Kay. Coffin's award-winning painting, *The Rain,* was subsequently bought by a group of major collectors, including W. Seward Webb and Thomas B. Clarke, who donated it to The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Perhaps de Kay's animosity toward Coffin had something to do with Coffin being a rival critic, writing for the *Evening Post* and *The Nation* from 1886 to 1891, or Coffin's deep involvement in art world politics. Whatever the case, two years later in a review of Coffin's landscapes at the Avery Art Galleries, de Kay unctiously backpedaled on previous assertions, now that *The Rain* had been championed by a group of major collectors and given to the Metropolitan. "It is true that gratitude on the part of his fellow artists for the skill, taste, and unflinching devotion with which he has always labored whenever an exhibition had to be arranged may have been an element in the grant of such tokens of popularity; but it stands to reason that no artist whose work was poor could have received so many pledges of faith at the hands of his guild." Notwithstanding such a grudging admission, de Kay points to Coffin's youth and slow development as possible cause for his weakness: "But he has mastered technical processes up to a certain well-advanced point, and begins to hint at as something more than the ordinary, nicely-composed, well-painted landscape. As a rule, these pictures have a measure of stiffness about them, a lack of dreaminess, mystery, or passion, but here and there a more living breath has passed which gives excellent grounds for belief that some day we shall have work of the highest sort from an artist who is now too much occupied with affairs that only touch art on the material side." The critic then goes on to praise Coffin's nocturnes but notes his hard and formal style, although some are "very good, others excellent . . . ." Only at the end of his review does de Kay reveal the true nature of his animus:

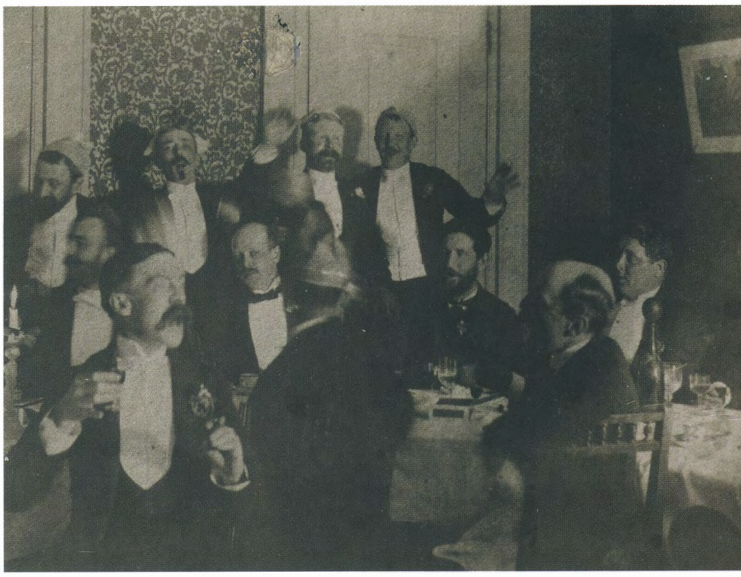


Fig. 8.10. William A. Coffin (standing, far right), among the artists at a banquet for Harry Siddons Mowbray, 1888. Miscellaneous Photography Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

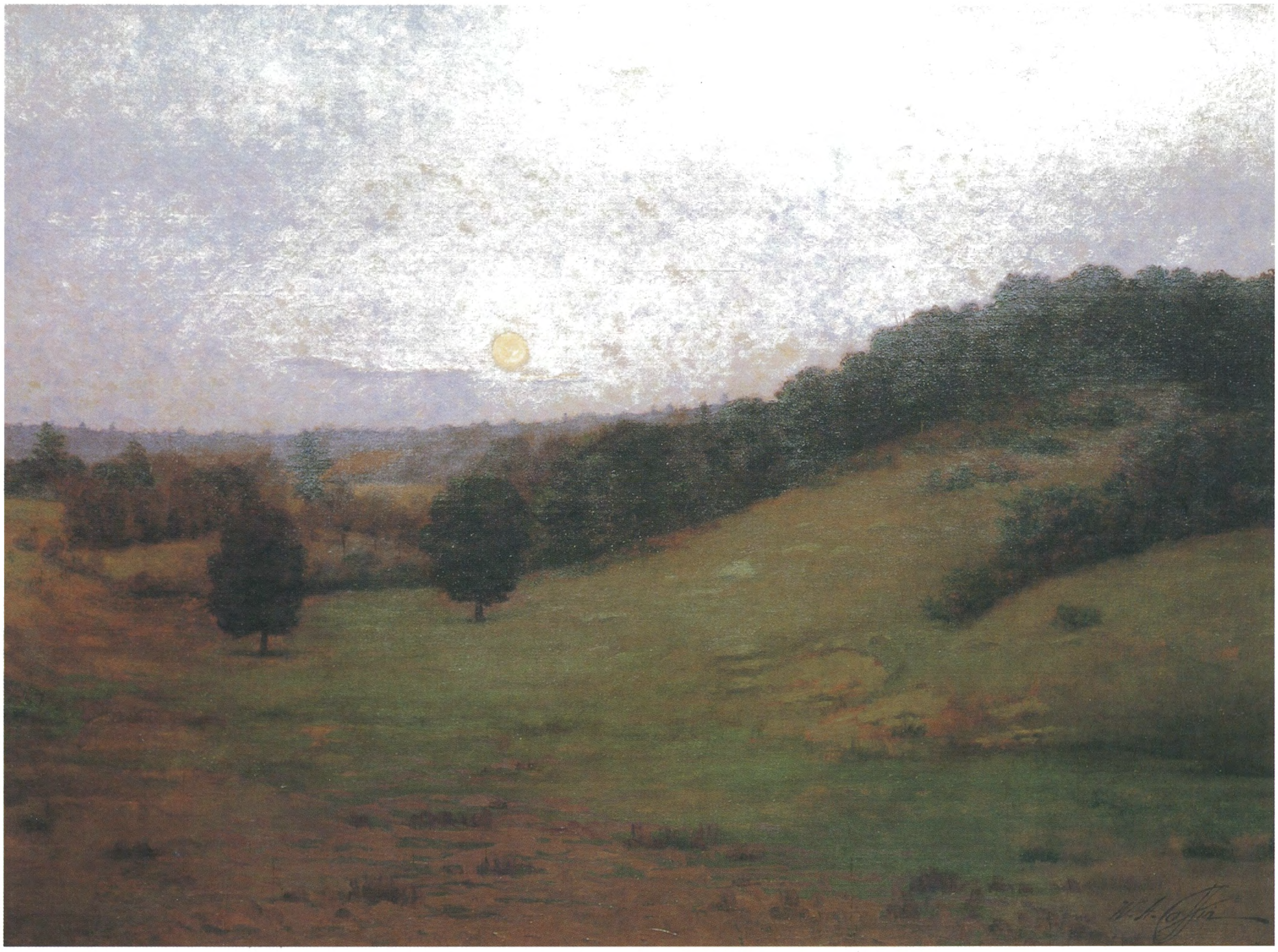


Fig. 8.11. William A. Coffin, *Early Moonrise*, 1888. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in. Collection of Douglas Ewertsen.

"Though a pupil of [Léon] Bonnat, and still much influenced by French ideals, he remains essentially American, and perhaps will turn his hand in time to historical painting . . . ."[47]

De Kay's visceral distaste of anything smacking of academic or foreign influence was unrelenting. And yet Coffin's *Early Moonrise*, 1888 (fig. 8.11), a bronze-medal winner at Paris in 1889, shows almost nothing in the way of academic rigidity. Owned by the collector and railroad magnate W. Seward Webb, founder of the Webb Prize at the Society of American Artists, the painting exudes sumptuous tonalities and a haunting silence registered in the subtle balance and patterning of landforms, very much in keeping with what Charles Melville Dewey, William Merritt Chase, Frederick W. Kost, and Dwight Tryon were producing during the same period. *Early Moonrise* has a transfixing lyricism—a deep feeling for solitude and stillness, unlike anything coming out of French academic circles of the day. De Kay's eventual softening toward Coffin possibly had to do with his brother-in-law, Richard Gilder, who owned a Coffin painting titled *Starlight* (date and location unknown); not to mention that Coffin wrote for *The Century Magazine* and became a member of the Fencers' Club, which de Kay had founded.

Coffin's oil *The Plain, Late Afternoon*, circa 1890 (fig. 8.12), displays the cool and quiet classicism of the artist's post-academic style. Coffin's control, deft touch, and infinite attention to modulated tonality and the subtle and architectonic patterning of form could well have seemed somewhat dry to a critic more responsive to the poetic raptures of Albert Pinkham Ryder. Nevertheless, Coffin's meticulous brushwork creates a sumptuous feel of vibrating green in the foreground, a soft luster of paint marks in the horizontal bands of cloud, and many pleasures for the attentive eye. Coffin was a painter's painter and what he lacked in outward exuberance he made up with rare subtleties of craft and insight into landscape structure.

Another work of quiet classicism, *Summer*, circa 1890 (fig. 8.13), features a delicate juxtaposition of tones in the foreground grasses with a minuet of leaf forms in the bushes along the meadow bank. The vibration of the green tones, the contrast of soft and hard-edged forms, and pitch-perfect modulations of enveloping atmosphere create a sense of unseen motion and of a season at its apogee. This deftly constructed equipoise of land masses contrasted with the highlighted detail of the foreground contributes to a sense of completeness, of nature large and small encapsulated in the mind's eye—a moment

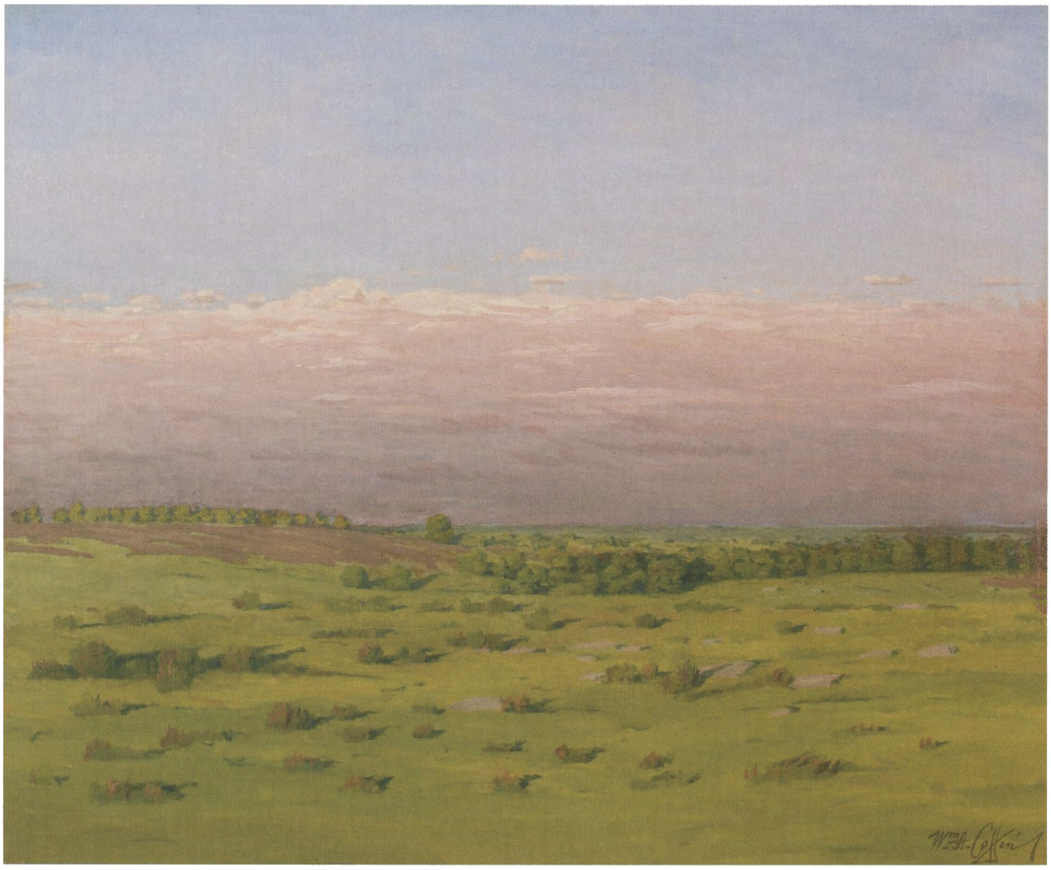


Fig. 8.12. William A. Coffin, *The Plain, Late Afternoon*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in. Private collection.

of time held in abeyance. All this was key to the modernist impulse to render subjective states and capture the essence of a moment, to realize an epiphany of the ordinary by doing away with rhetoric and distracting detail. As well as recalling some of La Farge's extraordinary small landscapes of the 1860s with their feeling of minutely activated light, *Summer* also looks forward to the Proustian reveries that would consume many modernist writers in the early twentieth century, who turned their back on plot to concentrate on character in an attempt to capture and record the evanescent impressions of memory. In a lecture he delivered on art education in 1897, Coffin discouraged preoccupation with storytelling, realistic detail, and idealization; he stressed the artist's attention to a subjective rendering of the passing moment: "If good composition was apparent, light and shade harmonizing, and sympathetic interpretation entered into its painting, there was sure to be value in the work." The *New York Times* reported Coffin's opinion on the future direction of painting: "The picture of the future, he fancied, observing the present tendency, would be of beautiful blacks and beautiful whites, with all intermediate shadings."[48] In this, Coffin was reflecting the inexorable gravitational force of James McNeill Whistler's late style of dark-hued Tonalism and expressive paint handling, which was then captivating New York, London, and Paris.

Coffin had six works displayed at the Chicago's World Fair of 1893, only behind Inness, Wyant, and Tryon in number of exhibited landscapes. The greatest collector of American Tonalism, William T. Evans, owned five Coffin landscapes. In addition to those of Clarke and Evans, Coffin was also in the collections of W. Seward Webb, Andrew Carnegie, and Isabella Stewart Gardner. In 1898, when he won a gold medal at the Art Club of Philadelphia, Coffin joined the "nine devoted apostles of American landscape," the Society of Landscape Painters—along with Frederick W. Kost, Leonard Ochtman, Bruce Crane, J. Francis Murphy and other fellow Tonalists—a move on Coffin's part that may have been prompted by a desire to further identify himself with an indigenous strain of landscape and distance himself from the bugbear of French academic modes. Such successes, artistic and social, prompted even de Kay in the catalogue of the Evans sale of 1900 to write of Coffin's transition from genre to landscape: "Gradually, however, the fascination of landscape led him to confine himself more and more to a field peculiarly American, and his finest pieces have been summer landscapes with thunder-storms passing over rolling pastures, night views in which a few stars burn mysteriously (possibly a reference to *Starlight*), and winter scenes with woodland and fields covered with snow."[49]

Coffin's fascination with a sympathetic interpretation of landscape is apparent in *Jennerstown, Pennsylvania, Spring Evening*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.14), a sparkling evocation of the

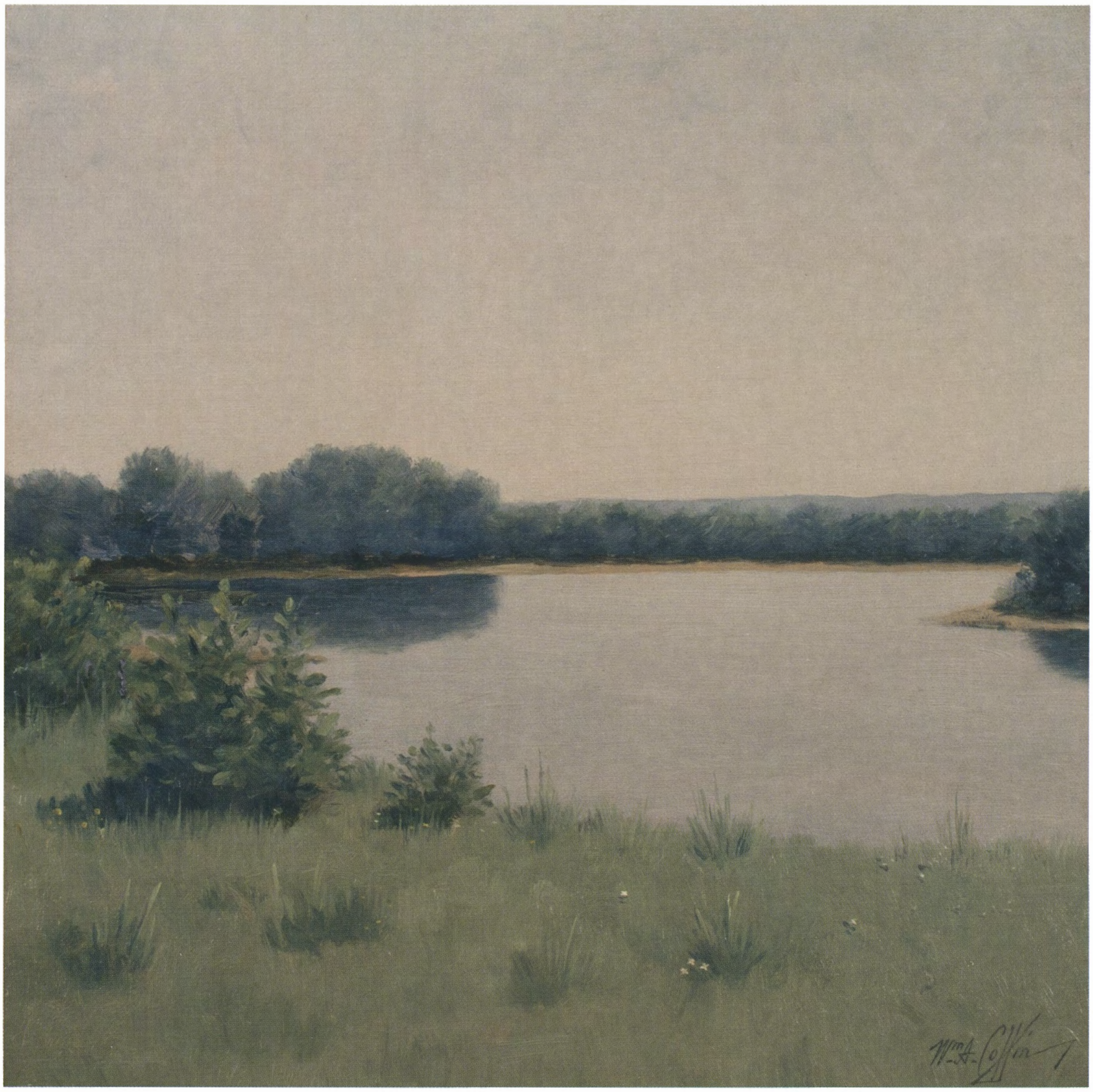


Fig. 8.13. William A. Coffin, *Summer*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 14 x 14 in. Private collection.

artist's hometown that combines a delicate feel for the soft atmospherics of dusk, a complex formal design of interlocking patterns that weave the middle-ground land forms into a sumptuous tapestry of emerald greens, and a sky of activated clouds that imposes a sensation of fleeting motion upon a world otherwise silent and serenely motionless. The melodic play of the color geometries that constitute the buildings at the crest of the hill provides a delightful counterpoint to the organic forms of trees and clouds that frame the town. *Jenner Valley Evening*, 1904–05 (fig. 8.15), painted near the artist's summer residence, demonstrates Coffin's move toward a more generalized expressive style, much in keeping with the Expressive Tonalism and dusky-hued landscapes popular after 1900. Something of Coffin's early academic love for structure and decorative patterning remains, but the painting is warmed with lush free-form facture, studied yet full of tantalizing abstraction approaching pointillism, which seethes and pulses on the canvas surface with a strange metamorphic energy. The interlocking diagonals of the fore- and middle-ground planes, which shift the eye through intervening space, further emphasize the rich mosaic of greens and browns (interchangeably used to depict positive and negative space) in meadows and trees. In turn, the distant tree lines are transformed into decorative assemblages, leading the eye toward the far horizon that fairly pulsates with amoebic points of color, while the sumptuous clouds floating overhead form stately horizontal bands of biomorphic shapes. Painted over a span of two years, *Jenner Valley Evening* is far from a scrupulously reproduced picturesque view, but was probably a painstakingly conceived composition requiring thousands of intricate studio adjustments. If Coffin shows signs of lingering academicism, he is also a sensuous conceptualist, guided by the imagination to elicit the undercurrents of metamorphosis enlivening all parts of the natural world. His deep reverence for the unseen but felt forces in landscape energizes even his more studied compositions with a spirit that is active rather than passive, a vital

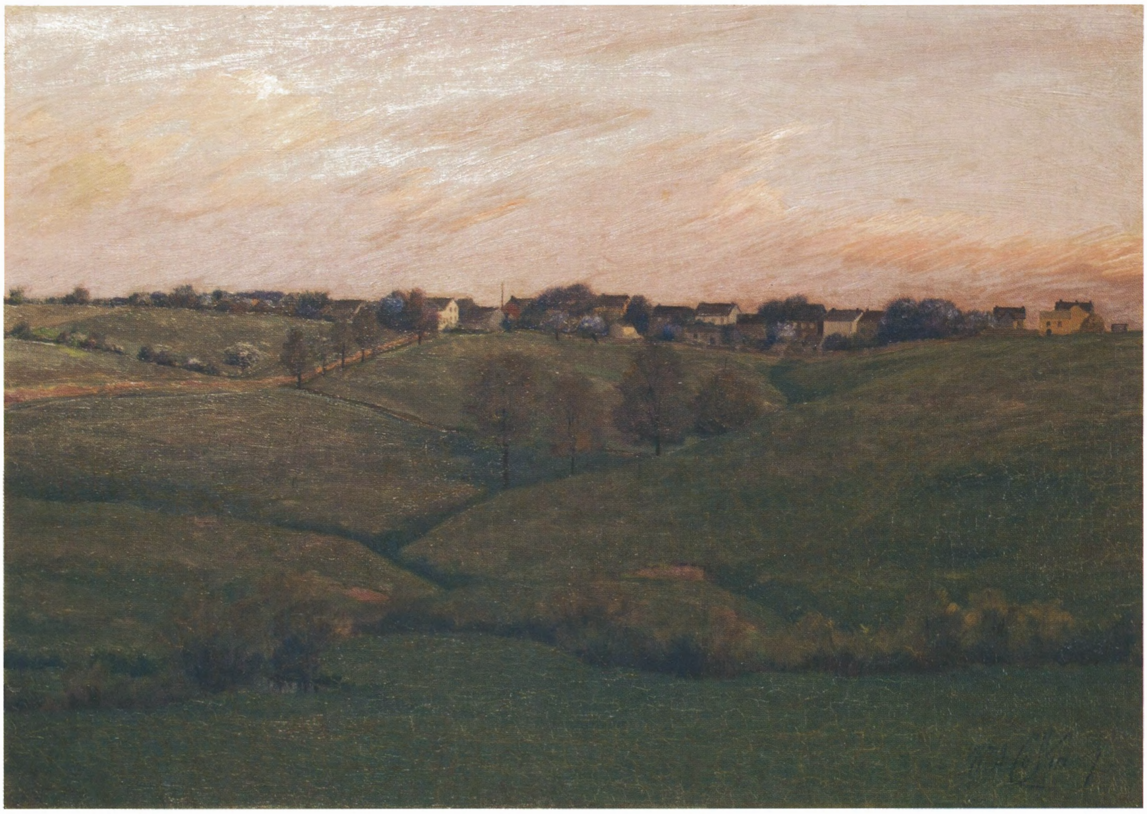


Fig. 8.14. William A. Coffin, *Jennerstown, Pennsylvania, Spring Evening*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 14 x 20 in. Private collection.

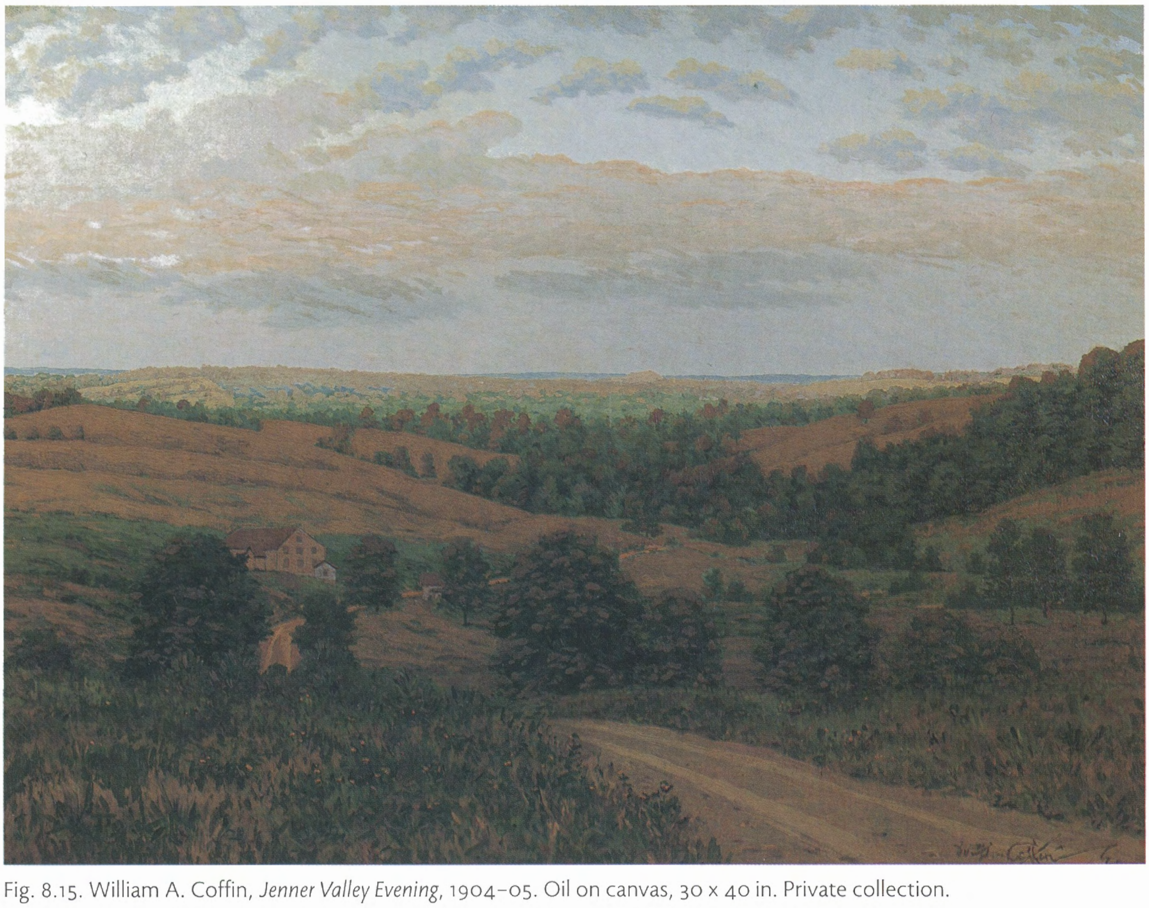


Fig. 8.15. William A. Coffin, *Jenner Valley Evening*, 1904–05. Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in. Private collection.

spirit that belies the stilted academicism of which de Kay accused him in the 1880s. A sale of more than sixty works by Coffin in 1904 was composed of many of his prizewinning Pennsylvania farmlands and a large number of nocturnes, many, according to de Kay, fine in "mystery and charm."[50] The sale may have marked a juncture in Coffin's output, placing *Jenner Valley Evening* at the departure point of new endeavors.

This anti-academic bias among critics of the day had a telling effect on directing Tonalism toward a more soft-edged and sensuous rendering. Critic Charles Caffin, too, in a 1915 appraisal of Coffin at the Knoedler Gallery, added his voice to what he described as "this surrender of the reasoning faculty to the spiritual apprehension of what is still the miracle of nature." Praising Coffin, Caffin displayed a long memory for earlier indiscretions: "[T]here was a time when the intellectual quality of his painting seemed to supersede the aesthetic, and his analytical tendency to override his feeling for synthesis. But time has wrought a change. In the nocturnes shown here he has abandoned the aggressiveness of detail and also the laboratory attitude towards nature of studying certain of its phenomenon. The spirit of nature has absorbed him. He has been intent on interpreting her spiritual suggestions."[51] In a review of the National Academy of Design annual exhibition in 1916, Coffin echoes his one-time critics by offering the criteria by which he preferred to be judged: "One will not haggle over technicalities with experts. But when it comes to considerations of a quality of mind and feeling embodied in a picture the experts cease to have any standing of special authority. In fact, their very preoccupation with technicalities may possibly obscure their judgment in the human direction. It may even bias their judgment on the esthetic of the picture's qualification as a color scheme."[52]

Coffin would go on to win silver medals in expositions at Charleston in 1902 and at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. And as late as 1919—his old ties to France, fortified by relief work during World War I to aid the families of French artists—he was appointed president of the committee for an important exhibition of American artists at the Musée du Luxembourg.[53]

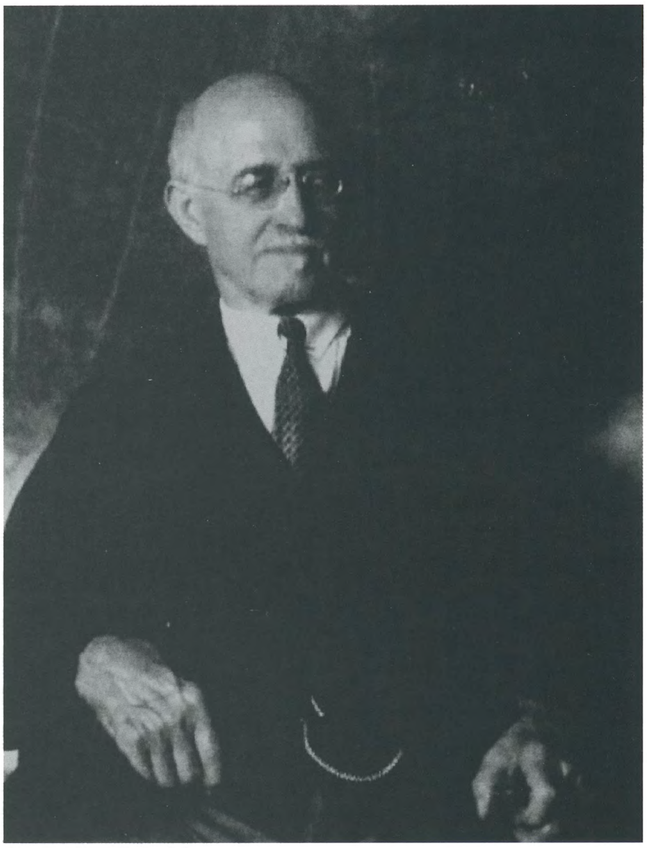


Fig. 8.16. Franklin De Haven, undated photograph.

Franklin De Haven (1856–1934)

Like Coffin, the painting of Franklin De Haven (fig. 8.16) gained greater expressive power after 1900. Much of his early work in the 1880s and 1890s was very fine in terms of classic Aesthetic Tonalism, but around the turn of the century his brushwork gained a new vigor and gestural emotion—and greater dramatic force. De Haven has been something of an enigma in American art history in terms of the quality of his production, not so much for its lack but because of the prolific amount of work of an uneven nature. He lived a long, productive life and seems to have painted many sketches and illustrative works directed at the commercial end of the market, which have tended to obscure his accomplishments as an artist of enormous power and expressive sensitivity. The range of his subject matter, extending from bucolic landscapes to seascapes, and changes in style from an early poetic Tonalism to a more vigorous and expressionistic paint handling in his later work, only complicates the grasp of his full achievement. Born in Bluffton, Indiana, the son of a well digger, De Haven maintained his midwestern roots until around 1882 when he first moved to New York and studied briefly with the artist George Smillie, who by that time had transitioned from his early Hudson River style to a more intimate version of Aesthetic Tonalism. Like other indigenous painters arriving in New York at the time, among them Charles Warren Eaton and Leonard Ochtman, De Haven took up the prevailing modes dominant at the Art Students League and the Society of American Artists in the 1880s: Whistlerian compositional strategies and the mystical subjective landscape of Inness and Wyant. *Evening*, 1887 (fig. 8.17), possibly painted in Milford, Pennsylvania, where the artist was working during these years, is a lush and dreamy example of Aesthetic Tonalism. With the sun over the horizon and the fading light reflected from the glowing sky, the landforms assume a blurred amorphous quality, silhouetted and thus dramatized to provide an eerie natural symbolism, while local color throughout is strangely enhanced, pulsing with a rarefied vibrancy as dusk metamorphoses into night. In the gloaming,

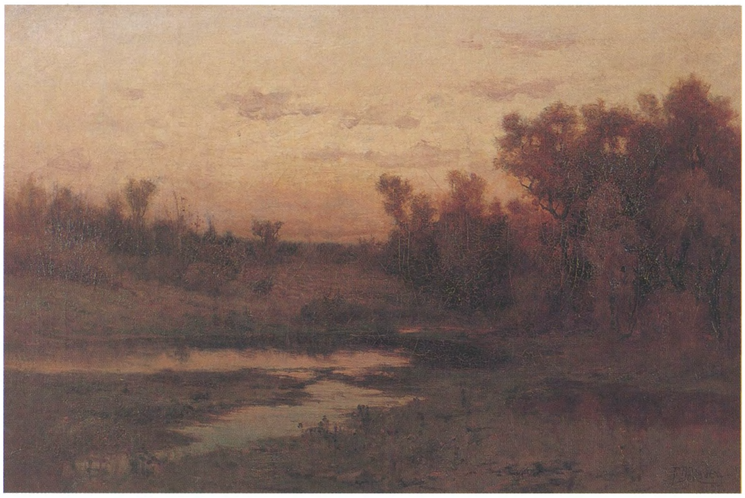


Fig. 8.17. Franklin De Haven, *Evening*, 1887. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Private collection.

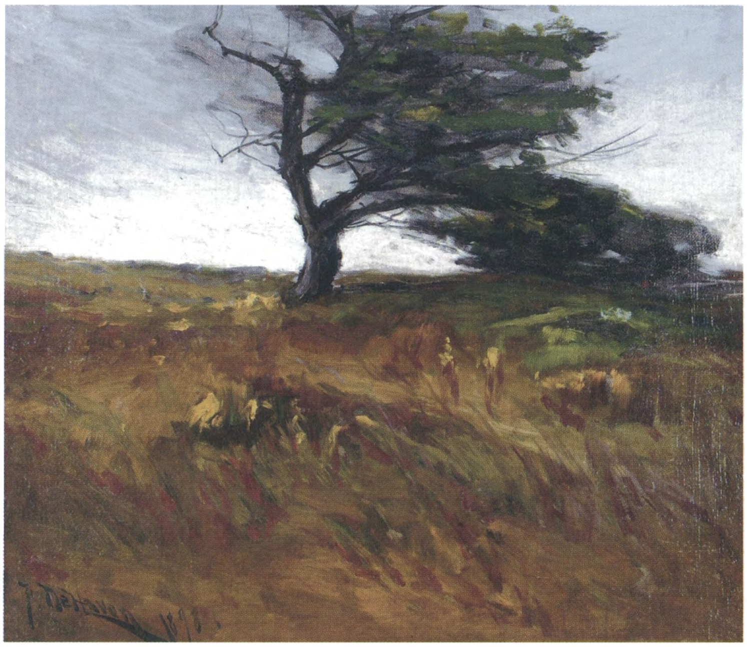


Fig. 8.18. Franklin De Haven, *Windblown Meadow*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 12 x 14 in. Private collection.

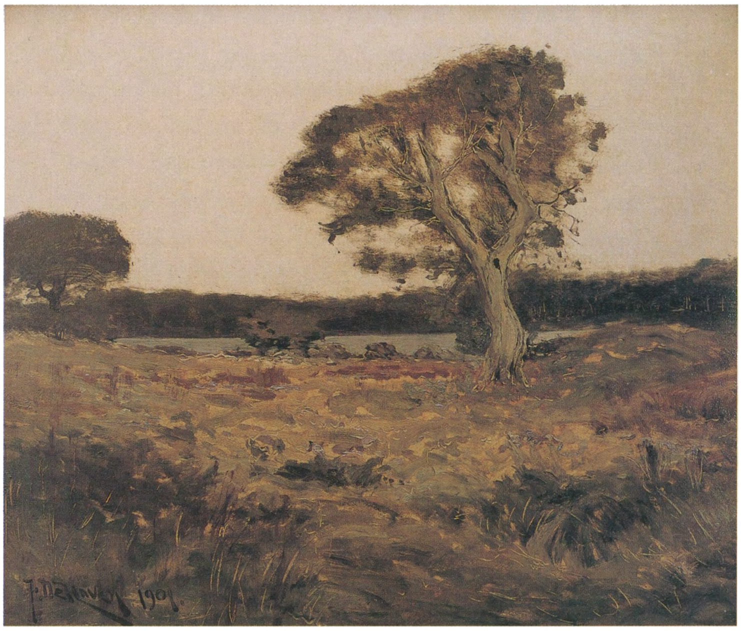


Fig. 8.19. Franklin De Haven, *Summer Dusk*, 1901. Oil on board, 16 x in. Private collection.

passages of glowing green eerily hover along the banks of the pond, while the reflecting surface of the water, transforming the surrounding grasses and trees, only adds to the timeless spell. The shadowy meadow flowers in the foreground, found throughout the Tonalist canon of the period, have a vivid painterly quality, displaying the thirty-year-old De Haven's early turn toward emotive expression, a tendency that would develop further over his long career.

By 1900, De Haven had hit his stride in the New York art world. He was represented in the collections of both Thomas B. Clarke and William Evans, as well as Samuel T. Shaw, vice president of the Salmagundi Club, who would amass a total of nine De Havens by 1926 when his collection was sold. The year 1900 also began a run of prizes for De Haven starting with the Inness Prize at the Salmagundi Club, followed by a medal at the Buffalo Pan-American Exposition of 1901. Crucially, he began to be noticed by Charles de Kay, who in 1898 had singled out a landscape by De Haven in the Pincus Chock Collection for "uncommon beauty" and his painting *Return from the Hayfield* (date and location unknown) as "fine in tone and well composed," comparing it favorably with a J. Francis Murphy.[54] A work of 1898, *Windblown Meadow* (fig. 8.18), explains de Kay's growing enthusiasm for De Haven; the artist had gained a new painterly exuberance and flair; his detailing is almost exclusively produced with a flourish of paint marks; and he balances his soft-edged masses with pitch-perfect notes of sharp linear contouring along the horizon and in the tree branches. The power of the wind seems to be literally animating the flow of pigment.

Summer Dusk, 1901 (fig. 8.19), is another indication of the enormous strides De Haven had made by this time in terms of a new freedom of expression and innovative painting handling. The work reflects remarkably bravura facture; the paint surface shows a variety of textures and applications; and the foreground greens froth and twist and fairly leap off the surface with only the incised lines made with the butt of the brush to offer visual clues to the sensuous contours of the grasses and bushes. The central tree features varied flat, textured, and incised paint application that is unusual and quirky for the time. And the background tree forms and tree lines across the lake are composed with flat green washes of expressive tone, with only a few etched lines to indicate trunks, while the sky is a perfectly flat and solid pale gray, utterly unrelieved by any hint of texture or cloud forms, pictorial or otherwise. The overall effect is striking for the sheer simplicity of means employed to create the illusion of a landscape pulsing with latent and

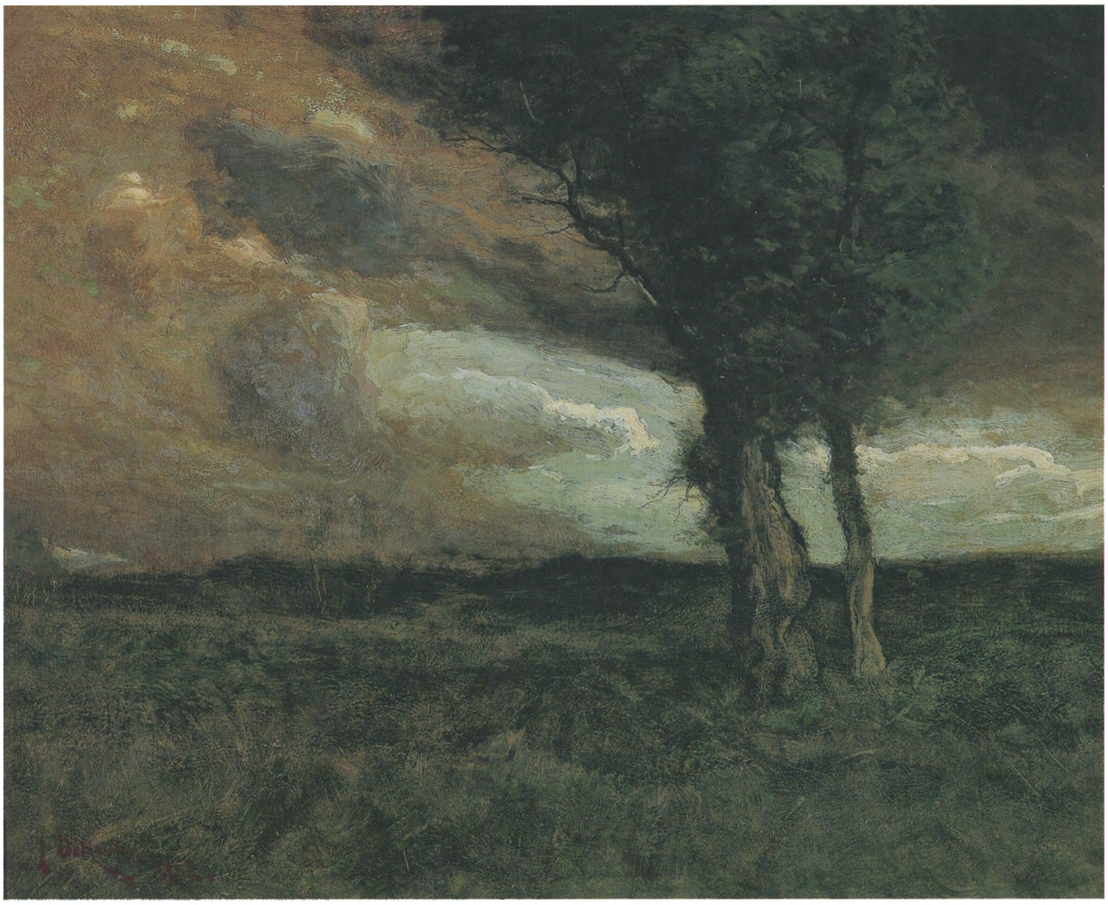


Fig. 8.20. Franklin De Haven, *Evening after Rain*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in. The O'Brien Collection of American Art, Sewickley, PA.

hidden forces. In the early years of the new century, De Haven seems to have reached a crescendo of pure expression; his subjective response is marshaled into ravishing paint marks as he recreates a scene at once familiar yet transformed by scintillating paint handling. In this, he was moving in tandem with many of the finest Tonalists of the period, artists who were exploring broader forms of Expressive Tonalism.

Evening after Rain, 1902 (fig. 8.20), again displays De Haven's evocative power as a handler of paint. At a time when Whistler's influence galvanized American artists at home and abroad to employ bravura facture within a tight range of near-monochromatic color, De Haven had simplified his composition, his tonal range, and thus increased the carrying power of each element. The ropy, writhing tree trunks and foaming masses of storm clouds above the barren landscape invoke a visceral kinetic energy, a kind of metamorphic abstraction that pours forth from the canvas—an artwork vitalized in the gestural manipulation of paint and color. Such a profundity of vision led De Haven's colleagues to recognize his achievements by bestowing silver medals on the artist at the Charleston Exposition of 1902, and at the Saint Louis World's Fair of 1904.

At a one-man show at the Kraushaar Galleries in 1903, Charles de Kay heralded De Haven's breakthrough to a higher level of artistic power: "It is pleasant to witness the gradual advance of a painter from the stage when his pictures merely offer an agreeable passage on the walls of a gallery, but do not compel one to linger over them, to the stage when he gains control of his implements and is able to express his own personality in such a fashion that one must stop to admire or criticize, appreciate or protest. This stage has been reached by Mr. Frank De Haven. . . . A certain low-toned, mellow landscape agreeable in composition, usually an autumnal scene at twilight or late in the afternoon, has been the signal for picture viewers to expect a canvas by this painter. It must have been a harsh critic who refused his respect to these pictures, but on the other hand it was asking much of people who have to pass thousands of pictures in review every month to give heed to a voice that spoke so gently from canvases like his. The exhibition at the Kraushaar Galleries contains two or three of the kind indicated, but others represent a new spirit which marks them apart as products of another bolder, finer style. A marine with tumbling surf is wrought with a strength and dash that advances Mr. De Haven close to Winslow Homer as a painter of the sea in movement. Placed beside the 'Cannon Rock,' by the latter, now shown at the exhibition of the Society of American Artists, this epitome of surge and foam would hold its own bravely. It has some of Homer's rugged qualities, though it lacks that setting of brown rocks which forms such a capital contrast to the slant surfaces of the water close to the shore. In his own way Homer is a master of composition, though a far from infallible master. While Frank De Haven is also well aware of the value of composition, he does not always conceal deeply enough his purpose to compose; that is why we are often insensible to really fine points in his painting."[55]

De Kay goes on to praise De Haven for his imaginative eye and ease of paint handling, and his emergence as a major figure in marine painting. De Haven had long been fascinated with the sea and coast, and spent many seasons painting in Maine and on Cape Cod. *Sunrise Waves*, 1898 (fig. 8.21), displays De Haven's contemplative take on the sea, concentrating on the scintillating array of intervening tones of aquamarine, turquoise, and soft pinks reflected from sky to water, and the delicate play of fading sunlight on the rocks. The artist's feel for changeable light and color and how it shapes perception is evident throughout. Having absorbed a Darwinian worldview, de Kay was drawn to art that touched on the metamorphic mysteries of nature. The sea with its currents and wave action was a wonderful source for the portrayal of movement and the ebb and flow of creative and destructive energy, to which De Haven had become attuned in his years living near the ocean. But in the end, the artist's growing expressive power, like that of so many of De Haven's fellow Tonalists, seems to have been more fully directed toward the landscape, especially as he learned to conceal more than he revealed. A 1906 *Brush and Pencil* article on De Haven included the artist in the "tonal school," along with Ranger, Inness, Martin, and Ochtman, among others, dedicated to expressing a sentiment and mood. "[T]heir best work always has the elusive charm that is akin to mystery, wonderment, devotion. And this is strictly a personal matter, resulting primarily from the ability to make color the handmaid of an acute interpretative sense . . . the emotion [De Haven] seeks to arouse is the genuine emotion that he himself has experienced and that he strives honestly to make others feel."[56] Befitting the patriotic clamor for a distinctly American art during the first decade of the twentieth century, the writer extols the virtues of De Haven as a self-taught artist, and as the artist prepares for a trip to Europe, expresses the hope, "that he will escape the snares of Paris and Munich."[57]

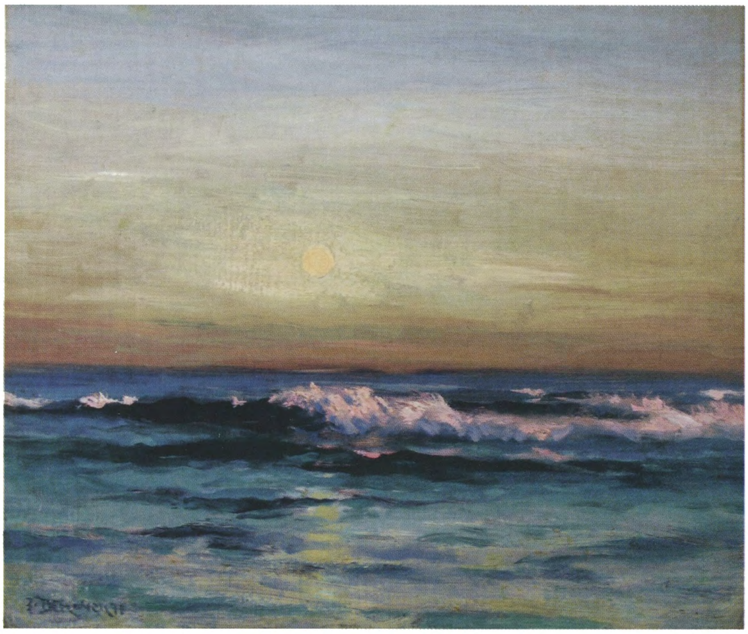


Fig. 8.21. Franklin De Haven, *Sunrise Waves*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 12 x 14 in. Private collection.

Fall Hillside, circa 1910 (fig. 8.22), shows the continuing development of De Haven along Expressionist lines, and his exuberance and joy in pure paint pervades the work. Wet-into-wet facture, scumbling, and scraped pigment make up most of the canvas surface, with only an occasional painted note to detail a fence post or tree trunk. Broad color forms act as primary conveyors of the compositional read. The energy of paint handling and of surface textures—pigment is slashed, dragged, flattened, and treated almost like relief sculpture—seems to offer itself as a metaphor for the microcosm of the activating forces behind nature. The upright boughs of the trees reach skyward like fervent worshippers of the air. The rugged windblown quality of a fall landscape, too, finds an approximation in the weathered feel of the paint. The artist's deep feeling for the natural world, for its vital equivalency in paint and color is everywhere apparent.

Something of De Haven's compulsion to minutely analyze nature in his art was noted in a *New York Times* article of 1906, which described the artist's five-week camping trip to South Dakota: "hunting and living close to nature, painting a bit to keep his hand in. One of his reasons for going out to that country was to make studies of the Indian's way of living. . . ."[58] In De Haven one detects the instincts of a naturalist, similar to Henry David Thoreau or John Burroughs, constantly exploring the nearby wilderness for inspiration and insight, much in keeping with his quiet character (his obituary noted that "he was of a retiring nature and shunned publicity"[59]).

Two works demonstrate De Haven's innovative Tonalist sensibility continuing into old age. *Silvery Waters*, 1916 (fig. 8.23), painted when the artist was sixty, combines a wonderful decorative use of a scrim of delicate, sinuous trees and broad curvaceous landforms in the background to create a work packed with both formal interest and deep emotional resonance. His broken Impressionist-style execution may be somewhat tamer than in his work of 1900–1910, but his feeling for living nature, especially in its painted morphology, or imaginative equivalence, remains undiminished. In *Autumn Stream*, circa 1918 (fig. 8.24), De Haven assumes an off-kilter and very low angle of vision—perhaps a fly fisherman's view in the midst of a stream—so that the power of the flowing water

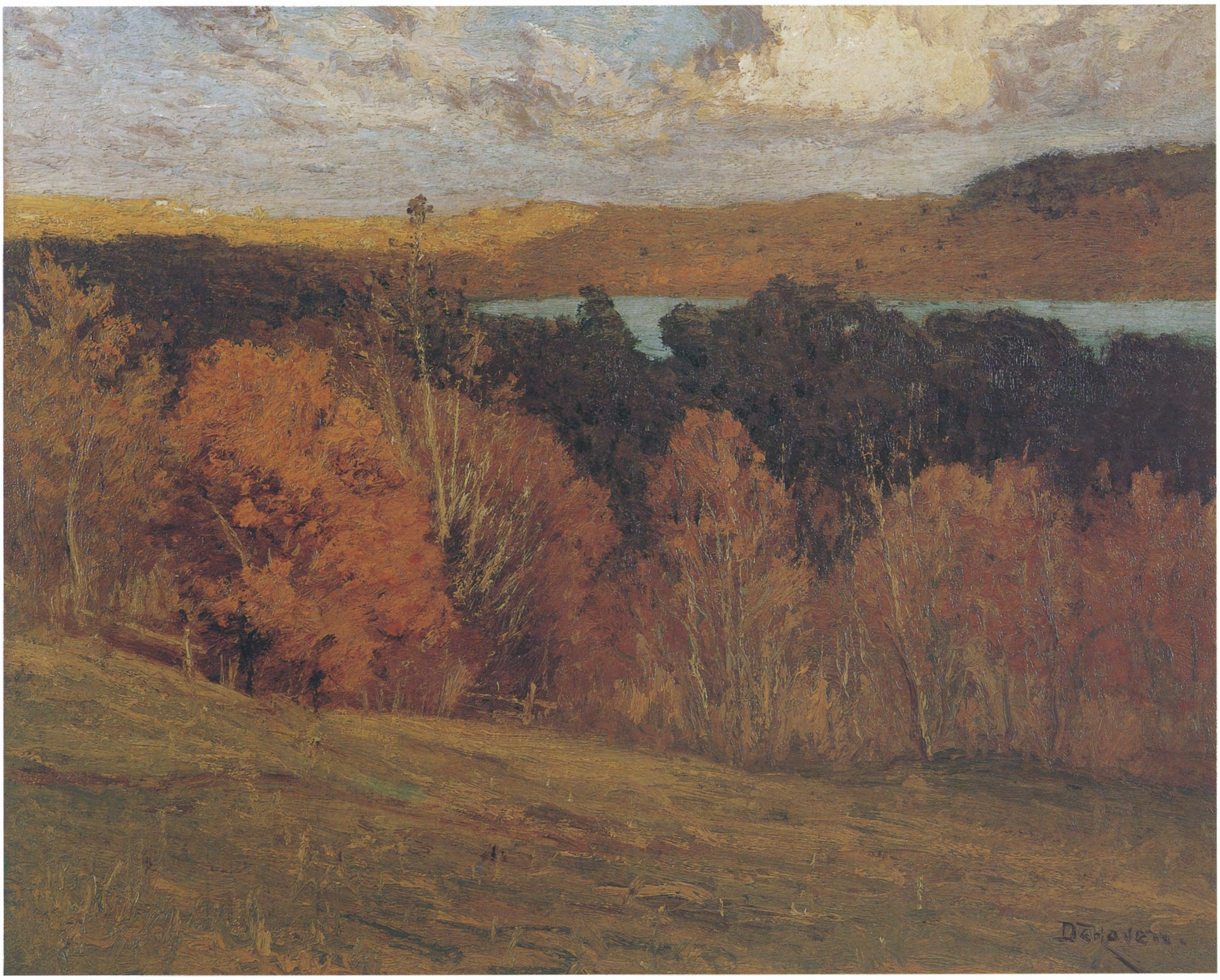


Fig. 8.22. Franklin De Haven, *Fall Hillside*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in. Private collection.

seems to energize the entire composition. Throughout, the artist's fluid paint marks, both soft- and hard-edged, describe a vortex of movement, especially in the blurred patches of vivid leaf color against the more somber browns and grays of dried foliage. The limited use of hard-edged form—or definition of any kind—confined entirely to tree trunks and branches enhances the ambiguity and confounds a traditional read of space organization. The indistinct transitions from the fluid reflections on the stream's surface to its stream bank have a similar effect. Although the work has an immediate decorative appeal, pulsing with autumn's fiery reds and oranges, the underlying subject is the metamorphic interpenetration of the material and spiritual realm, very much along the lines Thoreau had set out in his nature poetry. It is just such an amalgam of traditional modes with modernist strategies of expressive ambiguity that allowed Tonalism to broker forces conservative and liberal in an age of violent and unsettling change.

De Haven was a habitué of the Salmagundi Club, and many of his best works may well have been first shown in the

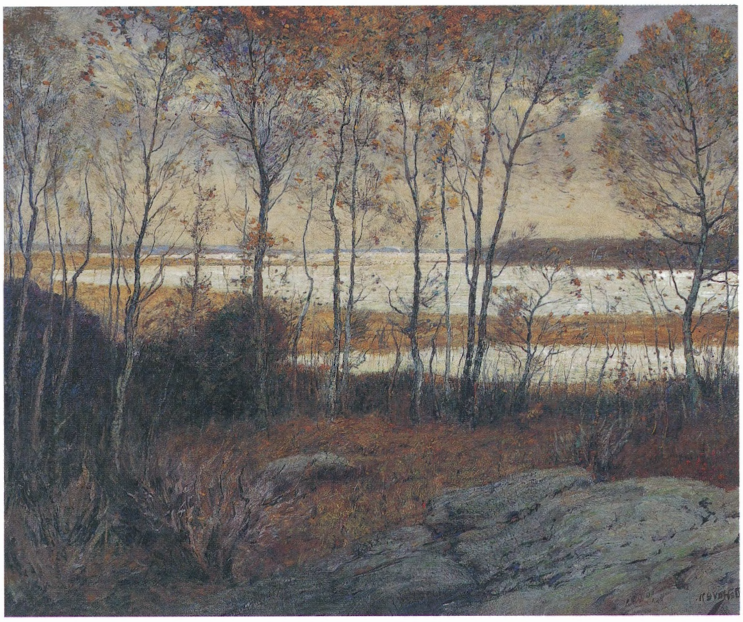


Fig. 8.23. Franklin De Haven, *Silvery Waters*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 39½ x 49½ in. The Butler Institute of American Art.

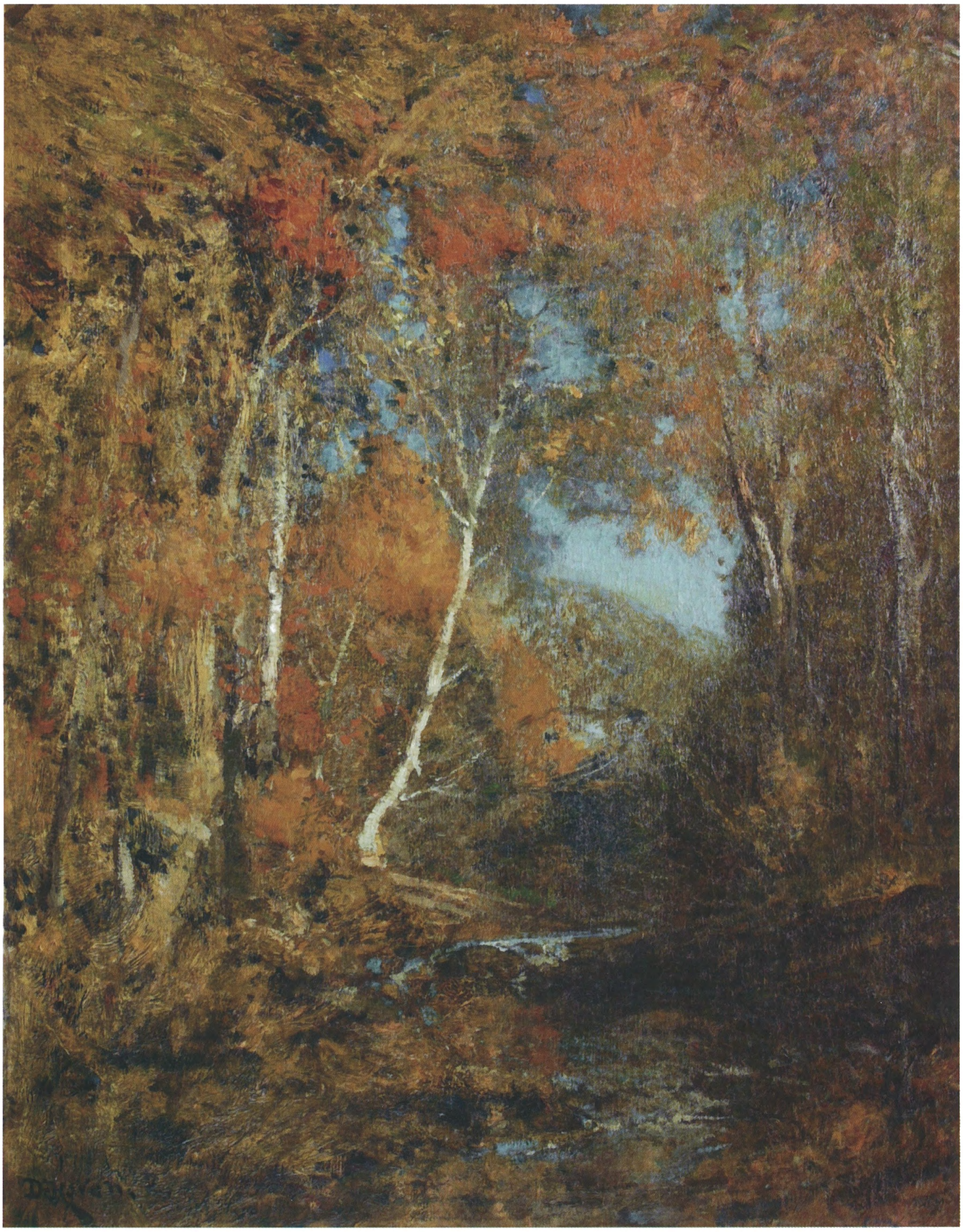


Fig. 8.24. Franklin De Haven, *Autumn Stream*, c. 1918. Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 in. Private collection.

club's numerous exhibitions. *November*, circa 1920 (fig. 8.25), was from a Salmagundi Club Thumb Box exhibition, and a fine example of how, even into the 1920s, the artist was still producing work of great power and vigorous handling, even on a small scale, winning a silver medal at the National Arts Club in 1921, a prize at the Salmagundi Club in 1925, and the Brown-Bigelow Gold Medal at the Allied Artists of America in 1930. Even within its limited dimensions, *November* overflows with painterly exuberance, from the coursing currents in the blue stream to the clamoring tree branches agitating the breezy sky, and the brittle sere wastage of fall's demise. The annual "Thumb Box" exhibitions at the Salmagundi Club, named for the small portable wooden paint box that held artists' work materials, limited the size of the artwork to no larger than 16 by 20 inches. It allowed the members of this artists' society an opportunity to show off their best work to one another in a single comprehensible exhibition, where all the works were of a similar scale. From 1926 to 1927, De Haven was president

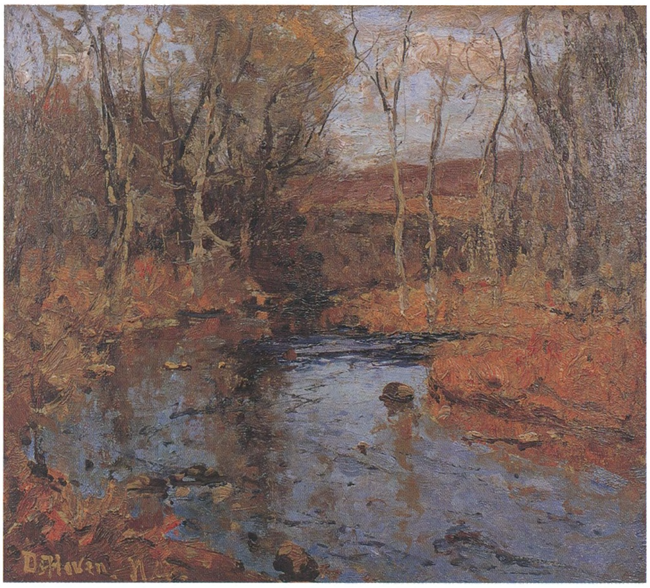


Fig. 8.25. Franklin De Haven, *November*, c. 1920. Oil on board, 9 x 10 in. Private collection.

of the Salmagundi Club, where he was affectionately known as "Pop"; he was also a maker of violins and a musician of some repute. He died in 1934 from a foot infection incurred at his summer home in Tolland, Connecticut, and the complications of a subsequent amputation.

Arthur Hoeber (1854–1915)

The artistic reputation of Arthur Hoeber, like that of William Coffin, has suffered from both his work as a journalist and his intense academic study early in his career. His alternate guise as a contemporary art writer and critic, including a stint at the *New York Times*, has been cited often by modernist scholars, especially his writings on avant-garde European masters like Matisse and Picasso as expressing his and his generation's antediluvian views on modernism. His role as a contemporary critic probably won him few friends in his day, while his early art training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with Jean-Léon Gérôme possibly tarred him as too beholden to French academic modes. Hoeber is a classic example of the expatriate American artists— like J. Alden Weir, Hugh Bolton Jones, and Birge Harrison—who were stamped less by study in Paris, and more by the experience of the American art colonies in Brittany and the atmospheric microclimate along the coast.

The French painter of subtle realistic effects, Jules Bastien-Lepage, further attuned Hoeber and his fellow expatriates to the translucent greens and crystalline atmosphere of Brittany. Although Hoeber gained salon successes with figurative genre works, shortly after his return to New York in 1886 he turned almost exclusively to landscape painting. Both the market and native affinities for landscape caused Hoeber to focus his creative energies on the painting grounds near his home base in Nutley, New Jersey, and his summer home in Hyannis, on Cape Cod. *Golden Twilight*, circa 1895 (fig. 8.26), displays Hoeber's superb academic training, deep residual feeling for the lush green tones experienced in the pearl-gray light of Brittany, and the atmospheric naturalism and high horizons that had been a hallmark of Bastien-Lepage's style in the early 1880s. By placing his perspective at ground level—a grasshopper's-eye view at the foreground plane—Hoeber indulges an academic love for the graceful calligraphy of the marsh grasses, the pulsing, vibrant greens of local color, while dramatizing his middle-ground tree line and its dreamy blurred forms against the pale gray sky. The arabesques of the foreground pool and the scattered eyelets of horizon light glowing through the trees add a sumptuous decorative appeal. Dominating all, the soft-edged silhouetted white pine looms with a mysterious attraction as if suspended in opaline space. He has effectively translated the feeling and light-saturated greens of the Brittany landscape to an American setting, a kind of post-academic naturalism, which earned him a place in the 1886 annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists.

As in the work of many members of the society, Hoeber's sense of light and color was forever imbued by what the artist had observed during his formative years. He wrote about his student days in Brittany and the indelible experience of the soft humid light, "that Brittany gray, like of which is to be seen nowhere else in the world—a soft, luminous, pearly color, giving qualities of opalescent light to the landscape and enveloping everything in a tender tone of sentiment and poetry, a joy to look at and an inspiration to the painter."[60]

Two small landscapes of the early 1890s, *Marsh Sunset* and *Twilight* (figs. 8.27 and 8.28), show the remarkable variations and exquisite range of subtle tonalities Hoeber was able to tease out of his sunset skies, and also the freedom and quiet exuberance of his brushwork. His favored painting grounds, the low-lying marshy New Jersey grasslands and the wetlands of Cape Cod, were clearly conducive to his love of delving into atmospheric effects in which broad skies and the reflecting surface of water set up a dynamic interchange of enchanting lighting effects, especially at dusk. Something of the challenge and fascination posed by these evanescent moments is found in an article he wrote on Mary Cassatt: "No one may give a formula for painting, for it is impossible to make rules applicable to color, or to have every eye see nature in the same way. Tone is so delicate and fugitive, so affected by circumstances, time, and surrounding conditions, that its diagnosis is hopeless."[61] These were hardly the words, or the artistic understanding, of a dyed-in-the-wool academic artist. Both *Marsh Sunset* and *Twilight* convey a spellbinding exploration of form viewed through the prism of atmosphere. The skies are painted with dozens of tones of blue, purple, cream, and pink, while much of the cloud work is executed with lusty swaths of thick pigment

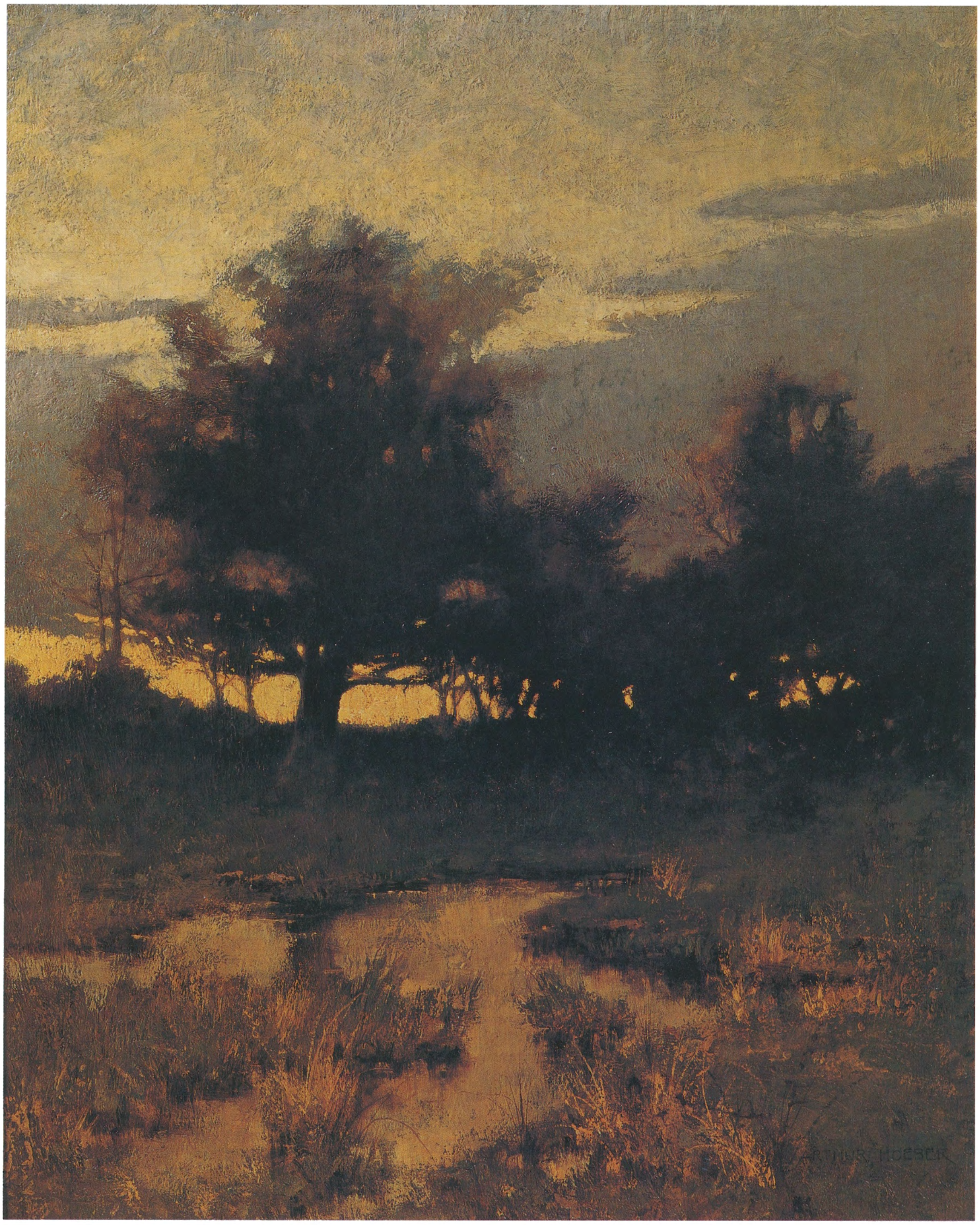


Fig. 8.26. Arthur Hoeber, *Golden Twilight*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 20 x16 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

and a pronounced energy and brio. Such gestural exuberance seems to contradict the visual outcome, the haunting feel of cool and calm that pervades these scenes, but is very much in keeping with the changeless dichotomy of metamorphosis: the feeling of ceaseless movement, of barely perceived change within changes, that constantly transform one moment into the next, one season into another.

By the mid- to late 1890s, Hoeber, inspired by the stately trees at his Nutley home, indulged a more precise rendering of nature, drawing on compositional aspects of Aesthetic Tonalism to create studied yet mysterious renderings of landscape within an even tighter spectrum of muted color. *The New Moon*, circa 1892 (fig. 8.29), displays a measured but lyrical feeling for formal concerns, especially in the placement of the trees and the crisp contours of the trunks and branches, contrasting hard and soft forms under muted light. In this work, Hoeber is clearly experimenting with patterns in the artful placement of natural forms, forms at once realistic yet highly decorative—appealing to the deft craftsmanship of the academically trained. *Winter Stream*, circa 1895 (fig. 8.30),

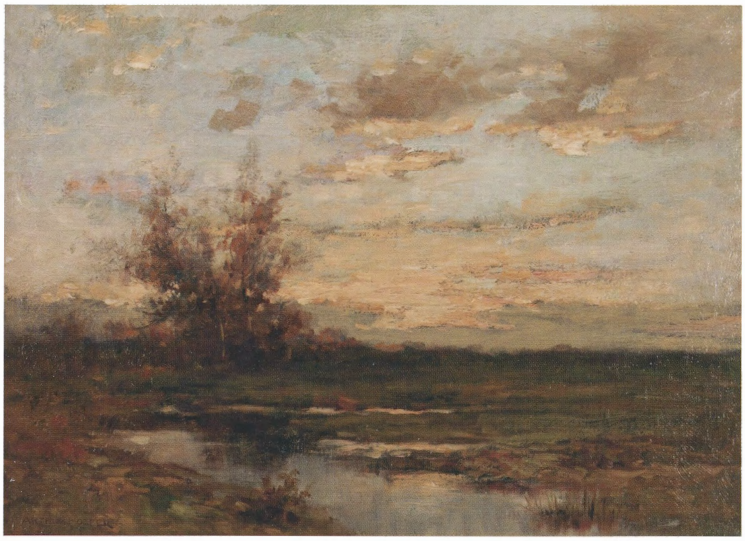


Fig. 8.27. Arthur Hoeber, *Marsh Sunset*. c. 1890s. Oil on canvas, 10 x 12 in. Private collection.

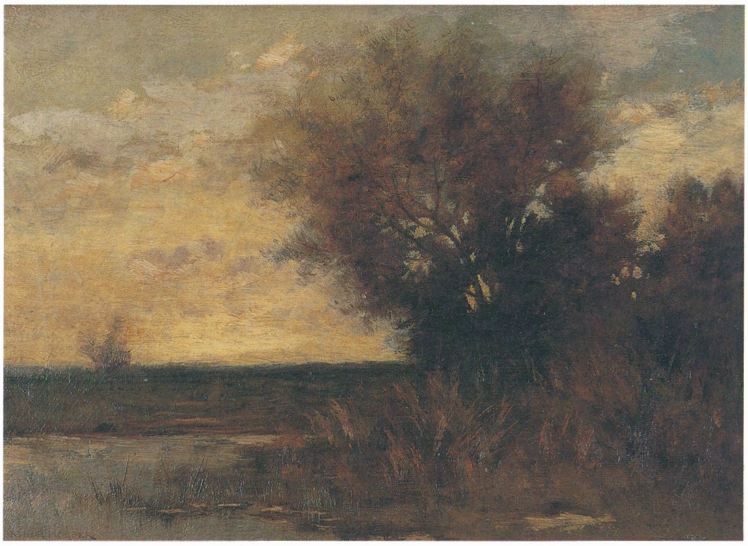


Fig. 8.28. Arthur Hoeber, *Twilight* c. 1890s. Oil on canvas, 10 x 14 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

provides similar rhythmic complexities and pleasures. Here, the forms of bare, branching trees against the stark grays and whites of winter create a bracing choreography of meticulously composed movements, like those of sometimes ungainly arms and elbows, that advance and recede from the canvas plane. The snow is rendered with a half-dozen complementary white tones—creams and grays and off-whites—which add a sense of vibrancy to the mute stillness. The compelling play of hard- and soft-edged forms, the mellifluous reflections in the stream, and the scintillating structural details jostling the amorphous masses of filtered light transform a scene of winter chill into a fantasy for the eye.

By 1900, Hoeber had clearly moved to broader, simpler, and more decorative modes, very much in keeping with the Expressive Tonalism of his colleagues. *Birches,* circa 1905 (fig. 8.31), displays a looser construction and broader paint handling from previous years, a development that Charles de Kay singled out in a Hoeber landscape at the 1902 annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists: "Among the landscapes on the west wall Arthur Hoeber's 'Autumn' is easily the best, owing to its large structural lines in the cloudwork and seascape, and the handling of the foreground."[62] The greater structural power of Hoeber's late landscapes, with a more dramatic graphic read, clearly appealed to de Kay, who was never willing to let the Tonalist painters rest on their laurels from the 1880s and 1890s, but challenged them to develop further.

Reviewing a 1903 exhibition of Hoeber's work at the Louis Katz Galleries, de Kay noted, "Of late years his style has become much more decided than ever before, freer in brushwork, and simple in composition. The finest examples now shown are also the simplest scenes—wide reaches of Cape Cod marsh with canopy of gray skies opening here and there to show long tracts of greenish ground, all painted with sure sweeps of the brush which are the opposite of that mottly, stipply method so beloved of painters who have tried to be plein-airists too early in their careers and failed to get the hang of it. There is some monotony in this little show; one longs for a sketch or a central landscape of special vigor, round which the others might array themselves. The excellence is an even thing, without much light and shade. And yet these landscapes do not repeat themselves, for they are varied as to season and time of day and they speak their several pieces with no uncertain voice."[63] Given de Kay's skepticism about Impressionism, especially its late academic manifestations, exalting the recreations of the beau monde, he was eager to encourage the American Tonalists to extend themselves in pursuit of more rigorous, focused, and expressive ends. And Hoeber, alongside many of his colleagues in these years, responded with a broad yet cool and refined Tonalism that communicated immediacy and greater dramatic carrying power.

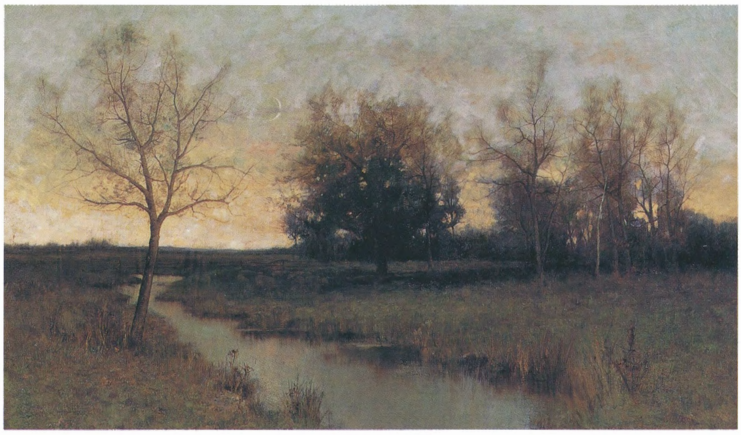


Fig. 8.29. Arthur Hoeber, *The New Moon*, c. 1892. Oil on canvas, 20 x 40 in. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Donald E. Petersen.

Lavish encouragement comes in de Kay's 1903 review of a Hoeber landscape in a Society of American Artists exhibition: "In this the sky is boldly given in fine sweeps of yellowish green,

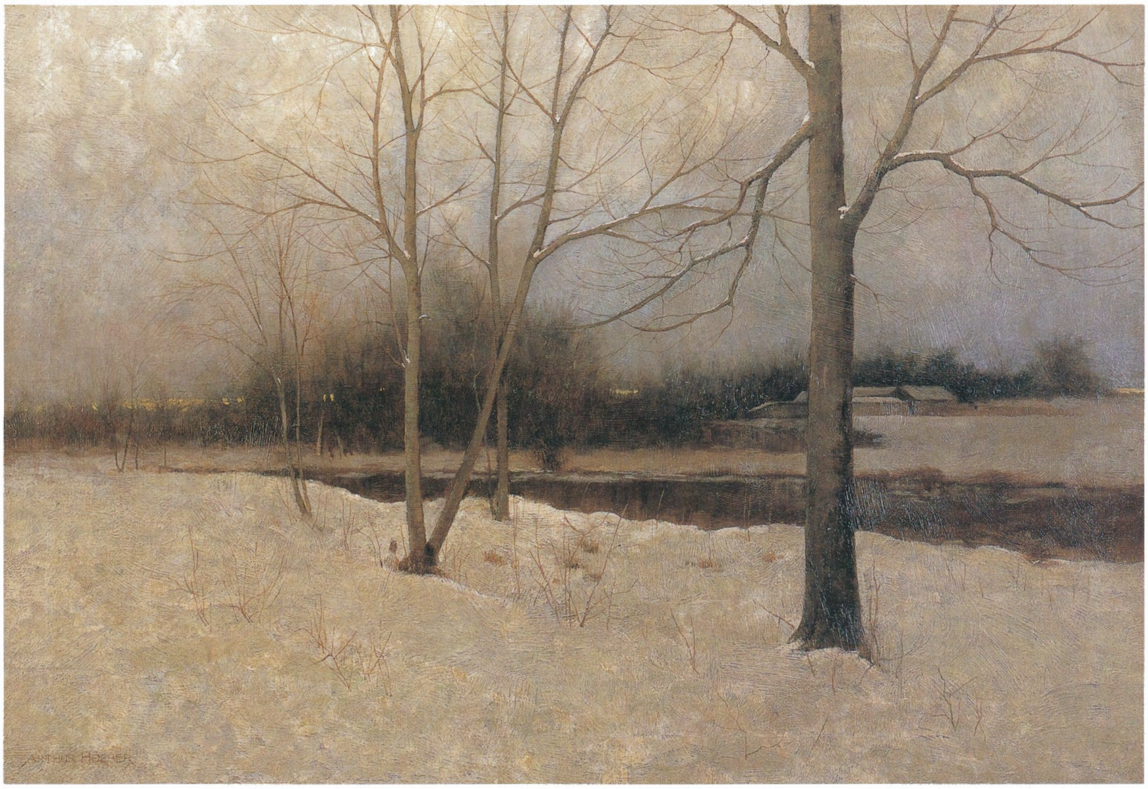


Fig. 8.30. Arthur Hoeber, *Winter Stream*, c. 1895. Oil on canvas, 22 x 32. Private collection.

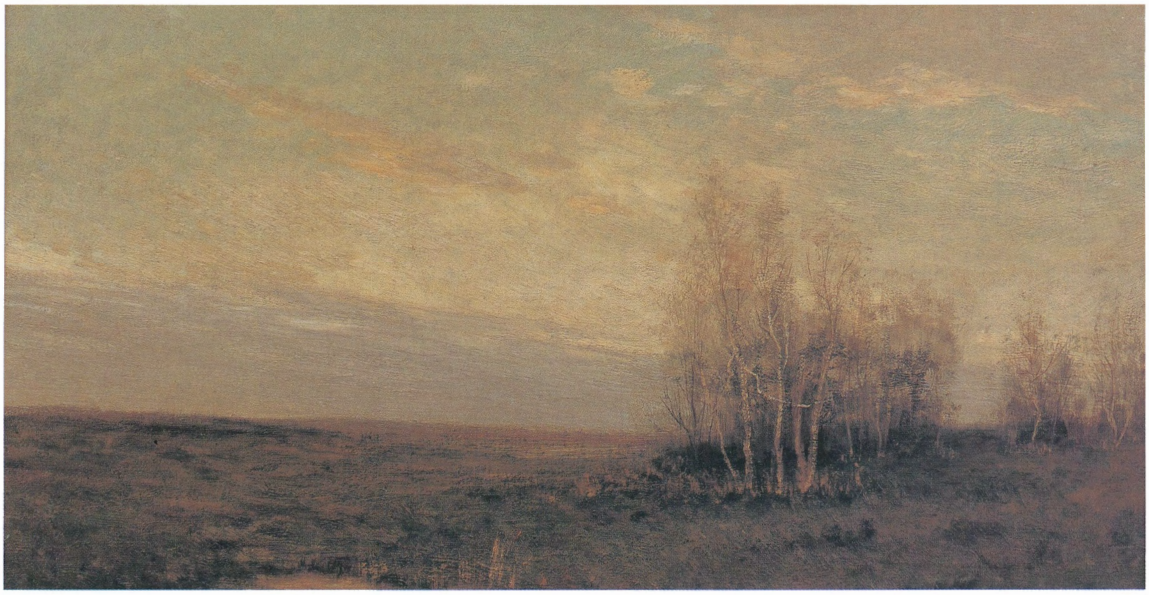


Fig. 8.31. Arthur Hoeber, *Birches*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 16 x 30 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

pinkish gray, and saffron nearer the horizon, which is framed in a dull bank of gray cloud."[64] Perhaps because Hoeber was also a Gilder circle insider, writing and illustrating for *The Century Magazine*, de Kay was more forgiving than to others with French academic backgrounds. Hoeber and de Kay's art writings were certainly similar in approach. In a 1905 discussion of a painting by fellow Tonalist artist Henry Golden Dearth, Hoeber touched on the artistic credo that animated his generation of artists and differentiated the Tonalists from the Impressionists: the all-encompassing energy of atmospheric light. "There is a harmonious relation of sky to earth, the tones of the former permeating the later as in nature; for, of course, it is from the sky that the earth receives its illumination, and the thousand surfaces of grass, growth, stone, and water reflect the light the heavens send out." Hoeber even employs a Darwinian paradigm to describe Dearth's process: "Mr. Dearth has gone through the experience of most painters, working faithfully before Nature, learning many of her secrets only by the closest observation, drawing seriously until the hand was trained to express, in a brush-sweep, the character of earth, sky, and trees. The process of elimination is slow and tedious but, happily, sure; to-day with much economy of line and subordination of all not absolutely essential, he evolves pictures that have dignity and poetry."[65] In this summation of Tonalist methodology to its starkest terms, Hoeber echoes the exploratory approaches of Thoreau and Darwin: the way in which the artist and scientist record sensory data, capturing the interplay of a thousand vibrant tones of green, all with the goal of eliciting nature's hidden energies. This was accomplished by eliminating the inessential—thus allowing the quiddity of lived experience a triumphant expression—to literally evolve pictures.

Hoeber's use of Darwinian metaphors, echoing de Kay's poetry and ruminations on Charles Melville Dewey, offers insights into the worldview of the Gilder circle, a cultural elite thoroughly attuned to the implications of evolution, especially on the battlefield for professional and public recognition, as when de Kay in a 1904 review proclaimed that a landscape by Hoeber should have been chosen over that of the younger William Redfield for the second Hallgarten Prize at the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition: "There is more to admire in this quiet scene that in the prizewinning landscape just mentioned, more truth to American landscape and atmosphere, and a finer sentiment."[66] De Kay was cool toward Redfield's developing Impressionist mode, both his "broad handling" and his compositional scheme, which lacked the integrity of design he so enjoyed in Hoeber.

In the first decade of the new century, Hoeber seemed to settle into a soothing decorative style, drawing less and less on nature or plein air observation and more on synthesis in the studio, working through imagination and memory. This move toward the decorative, the conceptualism of pattern, rhythm, and exquisite surface facture, was something Dwight Tryon and Thomas Dewing had successfully achieved. Whistler, of course, was the source and inspiration of this poetic mode. At a Macbeth Gallery exhibition of 1909, de Kay described a painting of Hoeber's, *A Phantasy*, as a thing, "of poetry all compact" (an allusion to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet / Are of imagination all compact."). De Kay, as was his wont, displays a hybrid sensibility, a kind of Whistlerian dreaminess energized by a Darwinian or scientific empiricism as a means to imaginative insights. "The title is 'A Phantasy,' and the pale-green tone enveloping sky, water, and land is not an effect of nature, but in the luminous air, the strong spring of the slender trees from their anchorage in the earth, the light foliage through which the night breeze seems to move, the liquid quality of the little pond, we have the record of a hundred carefully gathered impressions of the natural world let loose in a moment of true inspiration. Here we feel none of the toll of the conscientious observer and recorder, yet the simple little scene, daintily caught with a light brush, is eloquent of that laborious tilling of the ground without which art cannot produce its finer blossoms."[67] Hoeber, for his part, echoes de Kay's sentiments in one of his own reviews, noting the symbiotic relationships of the artist to his subject (the perceiver to the perceived): "[T]he artist having given expression upon canvas for many years to certain sympathetic themes, becomes more or less identified therewith . . . each painter for generations, time out of mind, has had predilections for this or that subject; and eventually he has found it, and his best follows."[68]

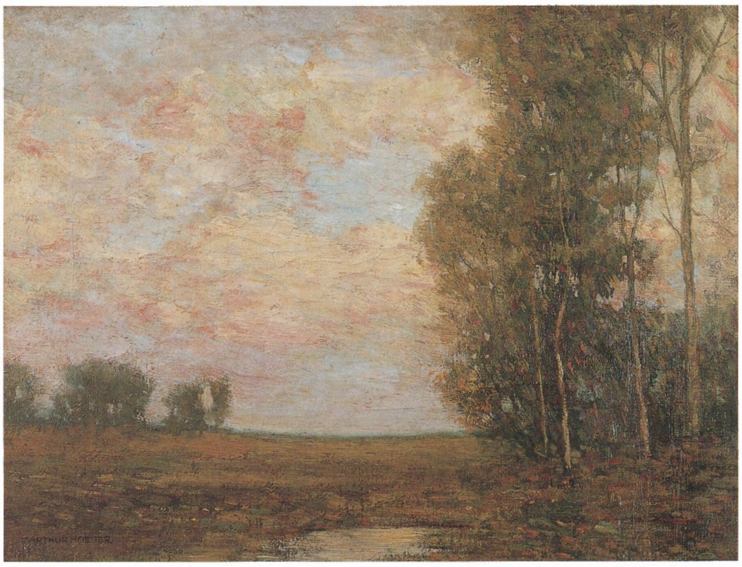


Fig. 8.32. Arthur Hoeber, *October*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

For all his erstwhile attachments to academic classicism, by the second decade of the century, Hoeber was experimenting with bolder facture and Post-Impressionist paint handling. *October*, circa 1910 (fig. 8.32), hints at these changes in the pronounced near-Pointillist arrangement of gemlike green and turquoise tones in the foreground and the sensuously stylized trees. The change in Hoeber's style was detected by de Kay in a one-man show at the Katz Galleries in 1911: "Mr. Hoeber's earlier work was delicate in color, simple in theme, and allied to what we call in the slang of criticism the 'tonal' school. His study of nature has been indefatigable and the sincerity of his treatment and observation has given his versions of comparatively humdrum themes a peculiar charm of intimate sentiment. The present group of his pictures, however, strikes a bolder note, several having the strong color and fresh touch of the radicals in realism." De Kay praises Hoeber for employing Impressionist methods, "without imitation of their manner," noting, "There is something inspiriting, however, in the willingness of a trained mind to receive new impressions. . . ."[69] Although Hoeber may have found it hard to appreciate the innovations of Matisse and American modernists like the painter Max Weber, he exulted in the work of George Bellows and Mary Cassatt, and was experimenting with his own work up to the end of his life, when he was suddenly felled by a heart attack while starting his car at his home, "The Enclosure," in Nutley. This tragedy prompted the following from Alfred Stieglitz (no fan of Hoeber) in a letter to Marsden Hartley: "I suppose you do not know that Arthur Hoeber died the other day. He died cranking his auto. Died from heart failure. I facetiously claim 'Art Failure.'"[70]

Collectors of Tonalism and the Rise of the American Art Market

The rise and establishment of landscape painting was the result not only of critical success and popularity but also of collectors voting extravagantly with their wallets. By 1900, Tonalist art was regarded as a good investment. The battle for for confirmation of artistic and investment worth for American artists had reached a turning point in 1899 with the auction of the collection of Thomas B. Clarke in New York (fig. 8.33). Clarke had made his money in dry goods, and entered into a dealer-patron relationship with George Inness; he then went on to build collections encompassing a wide range of art objects, periodically selling them off when the market seemed ripe. He was a voracious collector and connoisseur of anything and everything of beauty, amassing American paintings, Asian art, and finally a large group of early American portraits. In 1878 he became Inness's patron, dealer, intimate friend, financier, public relations manager, and all around fixer, especially useful when Inness repainted one of his patron's pictures. Clarke's devoted management of Inness's affairs was a godsend to the temperamental artist and allowed Inness the relatively carefree decade and a half before his death when he produced his greatest Tonalist works.

Clarke—and the patrons he found for Inness's work—was precisely the kind of enlightened and patriotic collector-patron that de Kay had been advocating for the American art market for over twenty years. As early as 1883, de Kay had been cultivating Clarke as the new Medici of American art: "[I]t proves that your business men who have tastes in the same direction need not fear the charge of extravagance, but may boldly indulge their mania, provided they set about it in the sensible manner of Mr. Clarke. Why is it that all the enormous fortunes that dazzle the eyes of the public here do next to nothing to encourage native art in the right way. . . . It is a fact that the spending of large sums on foreign pictures indiscriminately chosen has done much to depress the energies of native workmen."[71] By 1883 Clarke had already assembled a collection that de Kay compared with the finest exhibitions of the Society of American Artists; his collection consisted mostly of American landscapes with particular strengths in Inness, Murphy, Twachtman, and Homer.

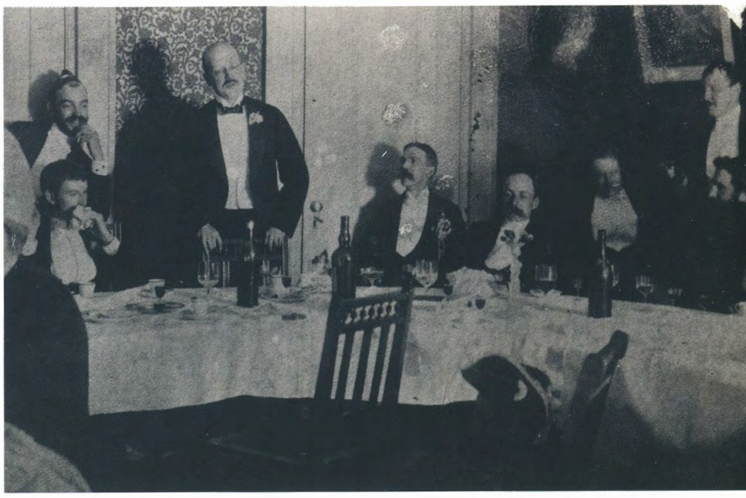
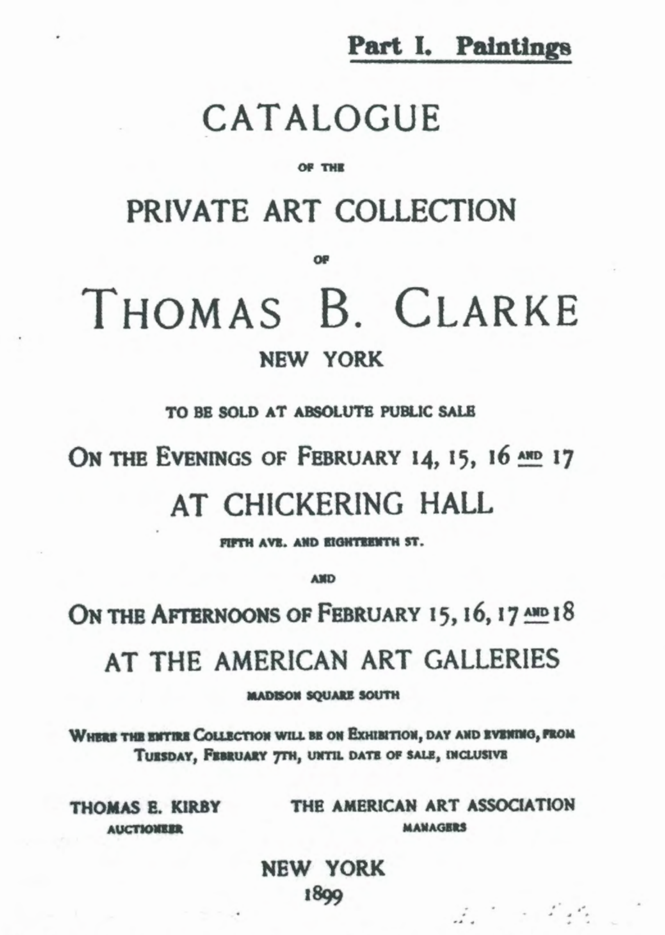


Fig. 8.33. Thomas B. Clarke (standing) and speaking at a banquet in honor of artist Harry Siddons Mowbray in New York, 1888. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

But de Kay and the American art world would still have to wait another fifteen or more years for the collecting and buying habits of well-off Americans to be weaned from the snobbish indulgence in the worst of European art—finally, near the turn-of-the-century, opting instead for the rising stock of the American Tonalists. In 1885, a J. Francis Murphy had been sold with European works owned by the collector George Seney for just $300, while two Rousseaus sold for $10,000 and $12,500, and a Breton for $18,200. At another Seney sale in 1891, 307 pictures sold for $663,045, the great majority French Barbizon painters, with a Millet going for $40,500, Troyons for $10,000 and up, Corots between $3,000 and $7,000, and other well-known French names commanding in the many thousands. Scattered among the works in the 1891 sale, with the economy at fever pitch before the panic of 1893, were a few Americans who brought respectable prices: Inness, $2,125 and $1,800; Charles Harold Davis, $1,000; Wyant $525, $650, $450; Hugh Bolton Jones $675; Robert Swain Gifford $600; Murphy $200; and Alexander Harrison $1,150.

The Clarke Sale, 1899

By 1899, the New York art world was eagerly awaiting the Clarke sale of 372 paintings devoted exclusively to American art. In the introduction to the sales catalogue (fig. 8.34), the artist and writer William A. Coffin offered some heartfelt—if self-serving—reminiscences of Clarke and his collection. "Mr. Clarke is widely known as a most intelligent and cultivated amateur. His acquaintance with his possessions is intimate, as that of many collectors is not, and he has acquired them because he liked them and wanted them. He was the first buyer of pictures to comprehend the merit and value of the work of our native school—principally, I should say, that painted in the past twenty-five years. . . . [I]ts reputation comes chiefly from Mr. Clarke's support of the artists who were known in the latter



Part I. Paintings

CATALOGUE
OF THE
PRIVATE ART COLLECTION
OF
THOMAS B. CLARKE
NEW YORK

TO BE SOLD AT ABSOLUTE PUBLIC SALE
ON THE EVENINGS OF FEBRUARY 14, 15, 16 AND 17
AT CHICKERING HALL
FIFTH AVE. AND EIGHTEENTH ST.
AND
ON THE AFTERNOONS OF FEBRUARY 15, 16, 17 AND 18
AT THE AMERICAN ART GALLERIES
MADISON SQUARE SOUTH

WHERE THE ENTIRE COLLECTION WILL BE ON EXHIBITION, DAY AND EVENING, FROM TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7TH, UNTIL DATE OF SALE, INCLUSIVE

THOMAS E. KIRBY
AUCTIONEER

THE AMERICAN ART ASSOCIATION
MANAGERS

NEW YORK
1899

Fig. 8.34. Front cover of catalogue of the Thomas B. Clarke sale, 1899.

part of the seventies as 'The Young Men.' Some of these are veterans now, of course. He was at the same time a great patron of Inness, Winslow Homer, and Wyant."[72] Coffin related further anecdotes about this insider's insider, a dealer-collector who haunted artist's studios and kept a vigilant eye out for the best new work available from the upcoming generation of Tonalists, who witnessed many of his finest paintings being finished on the artists' easels, and who spirited away more than one Inness masterpiece from his studio before the mercurial artist might change his mind and decide to work on the canvas further.

No one anticipated the Clarke sale more enthusiastically than Charles de Kay, who promoted it in the *New York Times*. In 1899, Clarke was a fully established figure on a par with William T. Evans; for more than fifteen years Clarke had managed the affairs of Inness and given out the Clarke Prize at the National Academy of Design; at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 he had lent the finest works by Homer and Inness. Ten days before the auction, de Kay began singing the praises of Clarke, "who showed the way to a dozen collectors by having the courage of his own convictions and buying work by our own men, no matter what people might say of the superiority of the foreigner." In the patriotic fervor following the Spanish-American War, de Kay again castigates those American collectors "who swear by Europe and all things European because life is easier there and the arrangements of society flatter the love of distinctions and ranks." De Kay then praises the democratic virtues of American art to the newly well-off collectors (many of whom Clarke had cultivated), an art "not only attractive as decorations in their homes, but excellent as investments. This is an unusual opportunity to get American work of high rank. . . . Mr. Clarke has had the taste to admire our colorists; his gallery is filled with most beautiful specimens of Homer D. Martin, George Inness, Albert Ryder, F. S. Church and A.T. Wyant, men who, it may be, only represent a passing phase of painting in the United States and may have no successors." Singling out Inness, Ryder, and Tryon (while giving Homer his usual backhanded praise), de Kay ended his article with an appeal to national pride. "American paintings are as much a part of our National birthright as our patriotic songs and our literature. They are an expression of American feeling and thought—varied, superficial, deep, naïve, or complex. The public ought to realize that an art like that of our painters, which has struggled to the front against the peculiar obstacles of European rivalry, is worthy of the most searching study and of encouragement. Patriotism as well as the intrinsic merits of the Clarke gallery should combine to make this a record-breaking sale."[73] De Kay's enthusiasm for "expression of American feeling," and his unrelenting Darwinian struggle against the alien incursion of European painting would soon be tested on the auction battlefield.

The first night of the Clarke sale saw the emergence of Inness, Martin, Wyant, Ryder, Tryon, and Homer as big sellers on the auction block, beginning an upward spiral in their prices over the following decades. Three Innesses sold for around $3,500; a Homer Dodge Martin reached $5,500—a spectacular turnaround for an artist who had died in near poverty only years before; a Wyant sold for $1,200; a Ryder sold for $2,250; a Tryon sold for $2,050 to the Corcoran Gallery; and two Homers brought $2,625 and $3,200. De Kay pointed out that the Martin was the largest price ever paid for an American landscape since sales of Frederick Church twenty-five years before, noting an excellent but small example of a Church that sold for a mere $300. On the second night, Inness caught fire with a price of $5,600; as did Homer, whose *Maine Coast* sold for $4,400, which, as de Kay pointed out, had only cost Clarke $1,500 two years before. Works by Charles Harold Davis, Dwight Tryon, and Charles Melville Dewey each sold at just over $1,000; while Murphy, William Coffin, Hugh Bolton Jones brought figures in the $500 range. The major surprise of the third night was the prices for Inness: $10,150 for *A Gray Lowery Day* (fig. 2.14), which had originally cost Clarke $2,000 in the early 1880s; and $6,100 paid by Henry Frick for *Clouded Sun*. Again, work by Hugh Bolton Jones, Leonard Ochtman, Murphy, and Wyant in the under $1,000 range did well. George Fuller's *A Romany Girl* fetched a startling $4,100. On the fourth and final night, Inness again topped the bill, his *Delaware Valley* going to the Metropolitan Museum for $8,100. A Wyant went for $2,500, a Tryon for $1,900, and a Murphy sold to the Corcoran for $2,100, while a Kost sold for $500, and two Jones for $500. De Kay summed up the grand total of $234,495 for 373 canvases as "a surprisingly large amount, and one that should be not only gratifying, but encouraging, to every lover of and believer in American art. Auctioneer Thomas F. Kirby remarked to a friend after the sale that in his long experience in picture auctions, he had never known a sale to be so well sustained and so successful as a whole."[74] After the heady buying of the first night, de Kay, in his enthusiasm, had predicted a total approaching $400,000, so he may have been disappointed by the final figure, certainly disappointed that lower-ranking artists like Blakelock were only selling for a few hundred dollars—this on the eve of the coming boom in works by Blakelock. Nevertheless, de Kay estimated that Clarke had made 60 to 70 percent on the sale, a sale that he hoped would set a precedent for a buoyant and rising American art market.

The fact that dealers and collectors of foreign painters did not attend the Clarke sale in the numbers he thought the evolving American market deserved rankled de Kay: "[T]hey do not find sufficient profit in American art as yet to be willing to invest in American paintings, and to push them not only abroad but in this market." Refuting the idea that there is no profit in American art, de Kay listed Clarke's profit margins on certain paintings: "It is easy to understand why Homer Martin's superb landscape, "Adirondack Scenery," whose painter is dead, and for which Mr. Clarke paid probably $1,500 or $2,000, should have sold on Tuesday night for $5,500, and also why George Inness's "Woodgatherers," (Inness is also dead,) for which Mr. Clarke probably paid about $2,000, should have cost Mr. George A. Hearn $5,600. . . . It is not easy to understand, however, why Cottier & Co. should have paid $2,250 on Tuesday night for A. P. Ryder's "Temple of the Mind," which probably represented a profit of over $500. . . ." De Kay also noted the poor showing of narrative pictures "due to the fact that from all appearances the vogue of the so-called story picture is over in America."[75] Although foreign dealers were absent, de Kay took consolation that collectors of foreign painters like George A. Hearn, Samuel Untermyer, and Julius Bache did buy the Tonalists, along with prominent American museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts—beginning a huge upswing in the institutional acquisition, by direct purchase or gift, of American Tonalism.

The Evans Sales, 1900 and 1913

The best snapshot of the rise in prices for American art, particularly Tonalism, in the first decade of the twentieth century is provided by the two William T. Evans sales of 1900 and 1913. As has been seen, Evans (figs. 8.35, 8.36) was the greatest collector of American art of his generation—certainly in terms of quantity and quality of works acquired—and as a tireless promoter of Tonalism during his many years directing exhibitions at the Lotos Club. He had sold off one collection, mostly of European paintings in 1890, and by 1900 had amassed another collection of at least 270 mostly Tonalist paintings, many bought directly from the artists.[76]

As with Clarke, de Kay cheered on the Evans sale with his reporting in the *Times*. The big surprise of the first night was the $4,750 paid by Cottier & Co. for Homer D. Martin's *Westchester Hills* (see fig. 2.26). A large Robert Minor sold for $3,050, which pleased the artist who was in attendance; while three Henry Ward Rangers sold for $1,400 (*Connecticut Woods*), $1,100, and $1,400—high figures for a living artist who would soon become identified by many as the leader of the Tonalist School. Wyant, Hugh Bolton Jones, Frederick W. Kost and Dewey all did well in the under $500 range. Such sales figures did much to support retail prices for contemporary artists like Kost (*Unloading, Coast of Holland*, c. 1890, fig. 8.37) and Dewey (*Rouch House at Twilight*, c. 1910, fig. 8.38), encouraging collectors of limited means to buy American art with confidence, both in terms of artistic merit and investment potential. De Kay was so pleased, he wrote a letter to Evans after the first night's results: "The figures at which your pictures went last night proved pretty conclusively that our amateurs propose to own American pictures hereafter and that the Clarke sale was not a flash-in-the-pan."[77] On the following night, George A. Hearn,

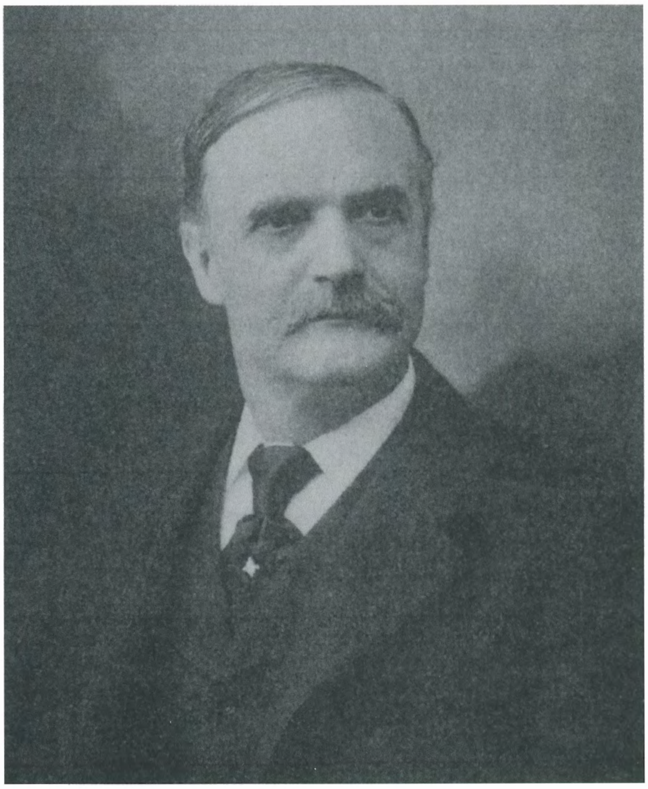
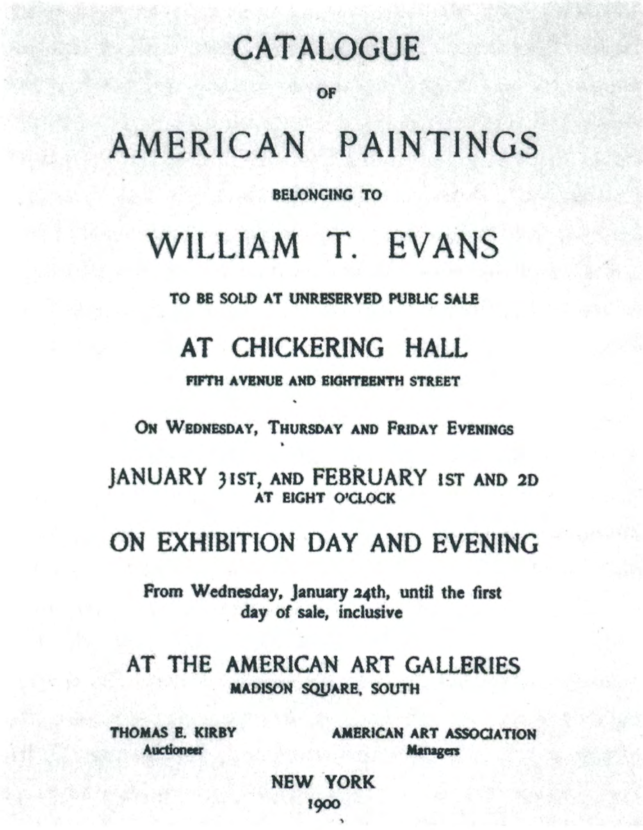


Fig. 8.35. William T. Evans, undated photograph.



CATALOGUE

OF

AMERICAN PAINTINGS

BELONGING TO

WILLIAM T. EVANS

TO BE SOLD AT UNRESERVED PUBLIC SALE

AT CHICKERING HALL

FIFTH AVENUE AND EIGHTEENTH STREET

ON WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY AND FRIDAY EVENINGS

JANUARY 31ST, AND FEBRUARY 1ST AND 2D

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK

ON EXHIBITION DAY AND EVENING

From Wednesday, January 24th, until the first
day of sale, inclusive

AT THE AMERICAN ART GALLERIES

MADISON SQUARE, SOUTH

THOMAS E. KIRBY
Auctioneer

AMERICAN ART ASSOCIATION
Managers

NEW YORK
1900

Fig. 8.36. Cover of catalogue of the Evans sale, 1900.

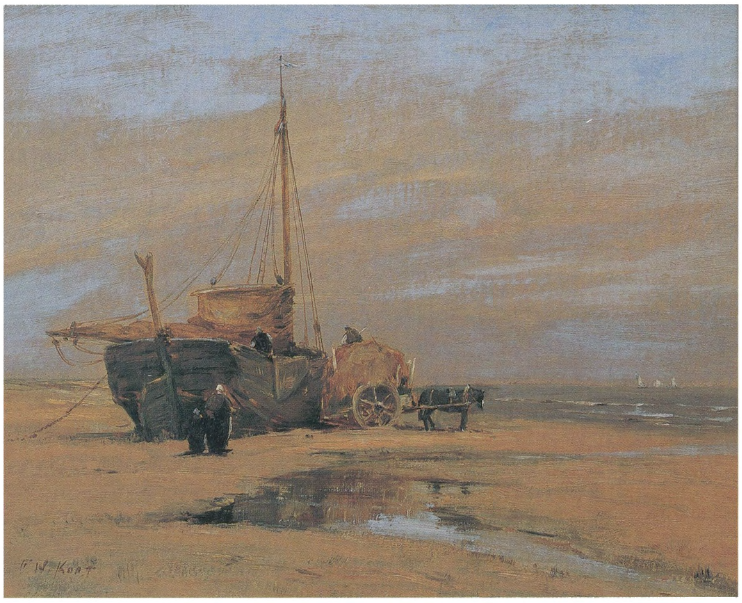


Fig. 8.37. Frederick W. Kost, *Unloading, Coast of Holland*, c. 1890. Oil on board, 15 x 19 in. Private collection.

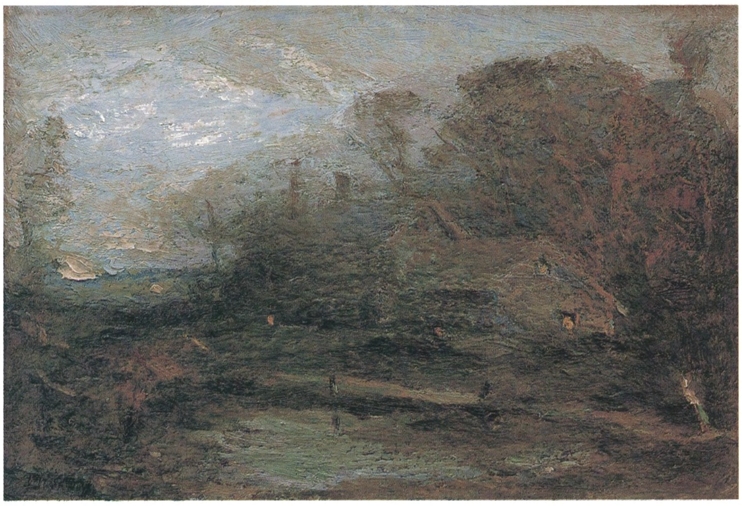


Fig. 8.38. Charles Melville Dewey, *Rouch House at Twilight*, c. 1910. Oil on board, 6 x 9 in. Private collection.

who would donate much of his vast holdings in Tonalism to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, bought Wyant's *In the Adirondacks* for $6,300. Artists selling at a thousand dollars and above included Inness, Martin, Tryon, Henry Ward Ranger, J. Francis Murphy, William Gedney Bunce, Homer, and George Fuller. In the five hundred and over range were Ben Foster, Franklin de Haven, Ryder, and Blakelock. Evans's 1900 sale realized $159,340, or about $590 per painting. The price levels were comparable to the Clarke sale of the previous year.

Newspaper reports indicate that Evans's overall return on sales was substantial. A comparison made by William Truettner of the original purchase prices and prices realized when sold at auction offers a gauge of the rise in value over the decade of the 1890s: "Homer's *Storm-beaten* rose in value from $1,500 to $4,000, Homer Martin's *Westchester Hills* from $1,000 to $4,750, Wyant's *In the Adirondacks* from $720 to $6,300, and Inness's *Return from the Pasture, Milton*, $575 to $980 (note: *Storm-beaten* sold for $11,500 in 1911, *Westchester Hills* brought $5,300 at the Milliken sale in 1902, *In the Adirondacks* brought $21,500 at the Hearn sale in 1918, and *Returning from Pasture, Milton* sold for $3,600 in 1917.)"[78]

William T. Evans was far from done. Between 1900 and his last sale in 1913 he amassed yet another collection, giving away over 200 paintings to major museums, including the Smithsonian Institution and the Montclair Art Museum, and selling the remainder in 1913. Between 1900 and 1913 he again stocked up on Tonalists, increasing his holdings of work by Blakelock, Dewing, La Farge, Homer Dodge Martin, Twachtman, J. Alden Weir, and Wyant. In 1913, Evans realized a total of $209,135 for 218 paintings, or about $960 per picture, versus $590 in 1900. The high points demonstrate the huge jump in prices over thirteen years: Blakelock, who had been selling in the hundreds in 1900, made $13,000 selling to ex-senator William T. Clark, who also bought a Wyant for $10,100. Other prices included $9,000 for a Martin; $6,400 for an Inness; $3,000 for a Tryon; $2,050 for a Ranger; and $2,125 for a Twachtman. William Macbeth, who was best positioned to evaluate the run-up between the Evans sales of 1900 and 1913, wrote in his obituary of Evans in 1919 that since the 1900 sale the paintings had risen enormously in value. "Of the total of 270 pictures [sold in 1900], the record of the forty-three known examples is worth more

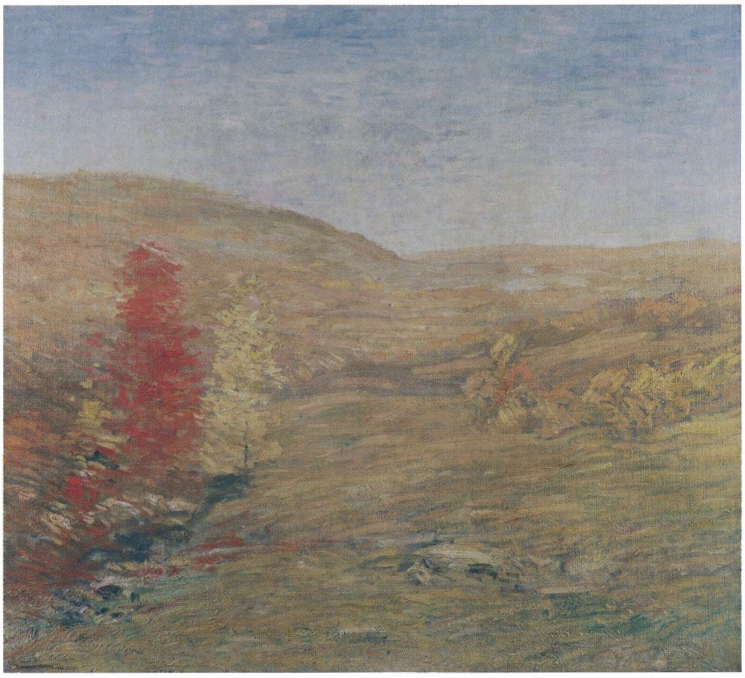


Fig. 8.39. J. Francis Murphy, *The Red Tree*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 40¼ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

than passing notice. These are by Martin, Wyant, Blakelock, Inness, Brush, Ryder, Tryon, Fuller, Robinson, Murphy, Walker, Homer, Dewing, and Weir—a varying number by each. They sold for $52,720. Basing their present valuation on what certain of the same pictures have brought in recent sales, and a conservative estimate of what the others would readily sell for . . . these same forty-three amount to the great sum of $260,000, or approximately five times their cost. . . . Most of the other pictures have not advanced at the same ratio, but . . . even these would average more than their 1900 prices."[79]

From the vantage point of 1913—and with Macbeth's near five hundred percent price rise in mind—de Kay described the 1900 Evans sale as a watershed in American art. "Instead of the loss which might have been expected in a sale of a large miscellaneous collection of recent work by American painters, there was a very substantial gain over the original cost of the pictures. People of limited means who were hesitating to venture on the purchase of some favorite canvas, were not a little encouraged by the outcome of the sale, since the prices then obtained indicated that there are buyers of American pictures about, and that to buy one is not necessarily to indulge in a luxury that absorbs money without a reasonable chance of its return, should conditions compel its surrender."[80] Evans went on to donate most of his collection to the Smithsonian Institution and the Montclair Art Museum. This path was followed by the collectors who took inspiration from Clarke and Evans, and eagerly bought at the 1899, 1900, and 1913 sales, like George A. Hearn, Alexander Humphries, John Gellatly, Senator William T. Clark, and Charles Freer. Most bequeathed their substantial holdings of Tonalism to museums.

But 1913 was far from the end of Tonalism's price appreciation. Even before the Evans sale, William T. Clark had paid $16,500 for an Inness at auction in January 1913, a sale which included two Wyants at $12,000 apiece and a J. Francis Murphy for $4,200, not to mention a Corot for a staggering $75,200.[81] By this time, Americans like Murphy (*The Red Tree*, 1912, fig. 8.39) were painting much larger canvases that allowed both a display of expressive paint handling and increased market return for mantel-sized pictures. Dealers like Knoedler, Vose, Macbeth, and Cottier were either buying for clients or competing with them, or each other, for the finest pictures—rarely did a good thing escape a canny purchaser. By 1917 and America's entrance into World War I, the market for Tonalism was at a near frenzy, only topped by prices in 1918. The Alexander Humphries (Humphries along with Evans had been a major participant in the Lotos Club exhibitions around 1900) sale in 1917 of 77 paintings broke records across the board, according to the *New York Times*. "It was the greatest one-night sale of the pictures of American artists that has ever been held. It was a night of smashing records. There was applause for picture after picture as sale records were broken, one after the other."[82] The *Times* noted that the average sale price per picture of $1,122 broke the earlier records of the Clarke and Evans sales of 1899, 1900, and 1913. The most startling record was the $15,600 paid for George Fuller's *Girl and Turkey* (date and location unknown). Other record prices included J. Francis Murphy (two for $5,000), Twachtman ($4,100), Ranger ($2,100), Minor, and Wyant ($5,000 and up). William Gedney Bunce's Venetian views were bringing around $1,000; Homer's watercolors in a range from $1,000 to $2,000; William Morris Hunt $3,200; while Ben Foster, Henry Golden Dearth, Henry Snell, and Elliot Daingerfield were bringing $500 and up. Such a rising tide allowed even small works like Daingerfield's *Wayside Copse*, circa 1910 (fig. 8.40) to bring a good return for the artist.

In 1918, with America fully engaged in World War I, prices for American Tonalism achieved yet higher results at the George A. Hearn sale. Inness, Wyant, and Murphy broke records and works by Blakelock came in just under the artist's $20,000 record. The sale may well have brought tears to Charles de Kay's eyes, for as he noted in the *New York Times*, "There were murmurs of admiration as the different pictures were presented, and the crowd stayed through the bigger part of the sale, leaving many vacant seats as soon as the work of the American men had been sold."[83] It had taken almost forty years to see the turnaround—when the European pictures in the George A. Hearn collection would play second fiddle to the American. Inness's *The Wood Gatherers* brought the highest price, a record $30,800—which received an "aggressive bid from the balcony" of $25,000 to start off the action. A Wyant sold for $21,500 and the record-breaking Murphy for $15,600

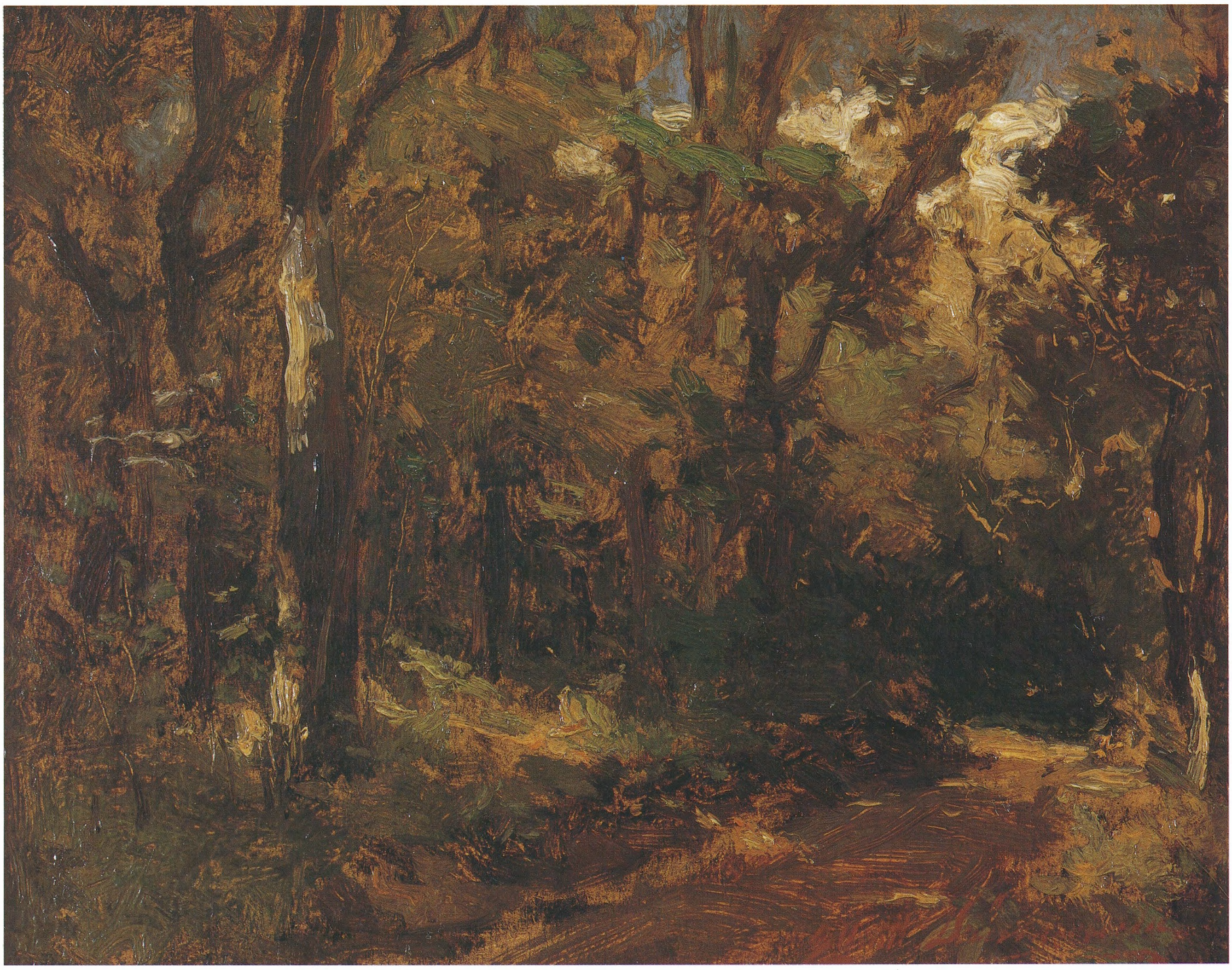


Fig. 8.40. Elliot Daingerfield, *Wayside Copse*, c. 1910. Oil on board, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

went to William T. Clark. Many more Murphys sold in the $5,000 and up range, many originally bought for around $500, showing a thousand percent return on investment in less than twenty years. The Blakelock landscape that sold for $17,500 was described in glowing terms by the artist Henry Watrous, a longstanding friend and supporter of Blakelock: "It stands out as a great painting—as great as was ever painted in this country or in any other. I do not believe that any of the Dutch artists or the Barbizon painters have excelled it."[84]

The heady patriotic exuberance of Watrous in 1918 offers a glimpse of the confidence gained during the previous two decades as the American Tonalists came into their own, the artists born between 1840 and 1865 becoming the art establishment—with soaring sales figures to prove their hard won bone fides. Both a fast-growing economy and America's gathering predominance on the world stage helped fuel the optimism. As the great collectors of Tonalism passed from the scene, their paintings were recycled in the marketplace, establishing higher and higher benchmark prices, many subsequently passing into museum collections. A good portion of Evans's best pictures did not go on the auction block and instead were donated to the Smithsonian Institution (now the National Museum of American Art), and the Montclair Art Museum. The same was true of George A. Hearn, whose best American works went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Hearn purchased 500 paintings in his lifetime, 150 of which were American). Charles Freer's collection went to his Freer Gallery, where his extraordinary collection of Whistler, Tryon, Dewing, and Thayer was enshrined on the Washington Mall. The Tonalist collector John Gellatly gave his entire collection of more than 130 American paintings to the Smithsonian Institution, including seventeen Ryders and some of Dewing's finest work. Numerous other American Tonalists shared in the prosperity through private galleries, many selling for less than the major names, some trading privately for much more that the auctions might suggest. Tonalism had become a smart investment.

The new affluence of the Tonalists arriving with the new century changed the way the artists did business. The commercial galleries took on more and more of the business of selling art, relegating both the National Academy of Design and the Society of American Artists to a secondary role of providing the artists with the necessary imprimatur of professional success and a modicum of publicity when prizes were won. For established artists like Murphy, the annual exhibitions were no longer critical to sales, and often an administrative burden. By the early years of the new century, the society and academy memberships almost entirely overlapped. Tonalist landscapes made up the majority of their exhibitions—exhibitions that were virtually indistinguishable. The redundancy in time and effort was clear to all and in 1906 the society and academy agreed to merge,[85] not without serious bickering over the status of society members who were not already academicians, and most crucially, the question of whether academicians should be forced to endure jury review in the annual exhibitions, as had been the case at the society since its inception.

The society had served its purpose; the radical progressives of the 1870s and 1880s had in turn become the conservative establishment. De Kay, for one, shed no tears; he understood that the big institutional exhibitions had gone the way of the old traditions of studio visits of decades before. "New York is too big and too flustered to revive studio receptions; the season of a few months is too concentrated; New York is too occupied with music and the drama, too hunted by dinners and social gatherings, even to pay much heed to the ever-increasing small exhibitions. The great crowd will attend only to a selection of the very best that the current art of the year has to offer. Minor exhibitions henceforth can hope to attract only those who specialize in painting and sculpture." The days when the grand academy and society exhibitions were major social events of the season had passed; de Kay hoped that the consolidation of forces might also provide for a more professional and democratic vetting process. "If the artists consolidate their forces and appeal to the public for means to supply New York with a great annual representative show it will be impossible for these evils to flourish as they have."[86] Little could he have imagined that only a year later in 1907, Robert Henri would use a perceived slight at the hands of the academy jury to launch "The Eight."

In the first joint selection jury in 1907 for the 82nd Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design, nine out of the twenty-seven jurors were dedicated Tonalist landscape painters: Hugh Bolton Jones, Henry B. Snell, Elliott Daingerfield, Ben Foster, Frederick W. Kost, John Francis Murphy, Emil Carlsen, and Leonard Ochtman (fig. 8.41). Now on the far side of middle age, these Tonalists had constituted the radical generation that had energized the Society of American Artists and the New York Water Color Club, putting these institutions in the forefront of change in American art. The market for their work had never been stronger and their prices would continue to rise into the 1920s. Landscape was the dominant genre.

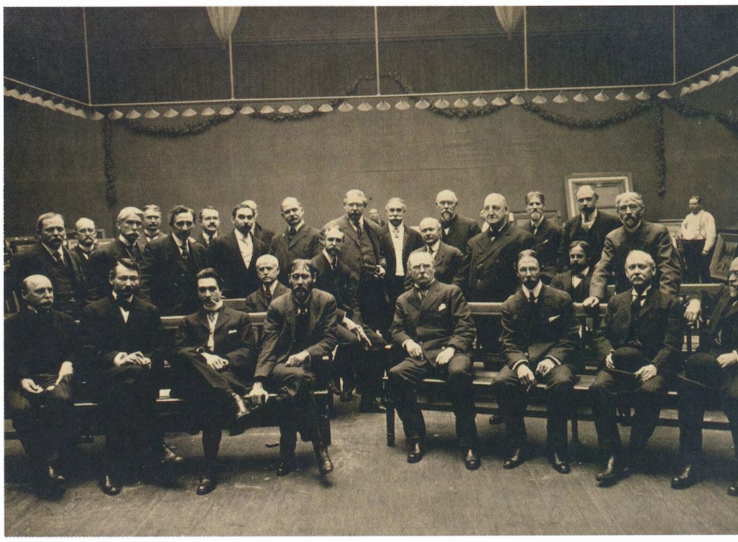


Fig. 8.41. Selection jury for the 82nd Annual Exhibition of the National Academy of Design, 1907. Front row (left to right): Samuel Isham, Robert Henri, E. Luis Mora, Kenyon Cox, Frederick Dielman, Irving R. Wiles, H. Bolton Jones, C. Y. Turner. Back row (left to right): Edward H. Potthast, William H. Howe, Henry B. Snell, Carlton Chapman, Elliott Daingerfield, Frederick G. R. Roth, Louis Loeb, Edwin H. Blashfield (behind Loeb), Ben Foster (seated), W. T. Smedley, J. W. Alexander (seated), Frederick W. Kost, H. W. Watrous, F. Coates Jones, J. Francis Murphy, G. W. Maynard, Emil Carlsen, William Sergeant Kendall (seated), Herbert Adams, Leonard Ochtman. Courtesy National Academy of Design, New York.

The predominance of landscape pictures in the Academy saw the thinning out of sentimental storytelling paintings—a tendency that de Kay noted in a 1906 article, not without a little satisfaction. "Slowly, it is true, but just as surely, have pictures that tell a story disappeared from the annual exhibitions, and with them is gone one of the elements which make up the popularity of picture shows . . . the anecdotists and story tellers have brought this bad weather on themselves by painting down to the intellectual level of childlike and primitive minds." De Kay attributed changes in buying habits of the art public to changes in the way people lived, such as the move to apartment living from houses, which was less conducive to the massed hanging of pictures that had been de rigueur in Victorian days past. New Yorkers were more mobile, traveling to suburbs and the countryside, another factor that predisposed buyers to landscape painting. Of paramount importance wrote de Kay, was a growing sophistication and connoisseurship among collectors. "Old masters have raised the requirements as to technical qualities, tone and composition, distinction and simplicity. The art of China and Japan has purified taste and made collectors fastidious: they demand quality rather than quantity, having learned from the Orientals the vulgarity of showing more pictures than one can enjoy."[87] In 1906, the figure painter George Barse Jr., a member of both the academy and the society, commented on the scarcity of figurative painters in contemporary exhibitions. "There is more patronage of landscape than figures just now. Moreover, our houses do not offer good wall spaces for figures. But shall I tell you the chief reason? Because it takes so much more drudgery, so much more study and effort, preliminary sketches, and questions to settle concerning composition. Artists find it much harder work, and soon after leaving the schools they drop it."[88] Barse's complaints were directed not just at the scarcity of figurative and narrative works in the exhibitions, but, as we have seen, the major collections contained fewer figurative and genre works, a fact reflected in a scarcity of auction results for such work, and fewer sales in the galleries. It is against this backdrop—the dominance of landscape and a slowing market for figurative works—that the trials and tribulations of "The Eight" in creating a market for realistic narrative depictions of everyday life can be better understood.

The Winds of Change: The Arrival of The Eight and the Development of a Vigorous and Expressive Landscape Art; The New Realism in American Art

Even as the Tonalist landscape consolidated its place in American art in the first decade of the twentieth century, new impulses in landscape art (especially the reemergence of the realist tradition in a new guise) were being felt as those artists born around 1865 began to make their way onto the art scene. The artist and writer Eliot Clark, born in 1883 and looking back from the perspective of 1954, succinctly caught the fulcrum point of change in the opening decade of the new century. "By the end of the nineteenth century, the invigorating influence of those artists who had matured in the 'eighties had been widely assimilated. The shock of innovation had passed. Although distinctive styles arose, the predominant trend was one of eclecticism. It represented a sophisticated aestheticism, with decorative rather than naturalistic significance. The predominant influence was a blending of the Whistlerian-Japanese linear-space conception with the plein air color of the French impressionists. From the extended panoramic vision in depth, which characterized the classical composition of the older painters, the angle of vision was reduced, the skyline raised. Scenic grandeur was no longer in fashion. The continent had been explored and depicted. The romanticism of uncultivated nature gave way to the near-by environment of intimate surroundings. The arrangement of subject matter and the immediacy of optical reaction became the theme of the painter."[89] Clark noted the new energy of the New York scene: the roar of motor cars replacing the hoofbeats of horses, apartment buildings replaced houses, while immigrants filled the streets, and, in the galleries, electric lights altered the way art was seen: the traditional regard for deep chiaroscuro and heavy glazing under natural—and often dim—lighting was giving way, slowly, as electric lighting encouraged painting with richer color and a more painterly surfaces.

The youth and energy of a new century translated into more vigorous ways of interpreting landscape for artists like Bellows and Henri, who "became eagerly absorbed in the architectonic and geometric structure underlying composition. This had a decisive influence on Bellows's picture planning, far removed from theoretical 'abstraction,' but forming the structure or realistic dramatization and compositional integration.... Realism and impressionism reinvigorated painting and extended the artist's field of observation. Method and technique had been transformed. The artist stood before his easel, viewing his work at long range; the mechanism of the brush was from the arm, not the wrist. The artist worked directly before the subject, the brush obeyed the eye with spontaneous precision. The preliminary lay-in was in mass, not in line. Pigment quality was valued more than 'finish,' carrying power more than naturalistic detail.... This new milieu directly affected the artists' ideology and temperament. The 'pretty' picture had become effete and effeminate. The palette changed from light prismatic scintillation to the opaque tones of the lower register. Direct impasto was considered more masculine and forthright than broken color and illusionistic vibration. Solidity, volume, carrying power became the new clichés. Manet replaced Monet."[90]

Younger artists, born after 1865, like Henri, Bellows (b. 1865), Rockwell Kent, Ernest Lawson, George Gardner Symons (b. 1863, *Silence and Fleeting Light*, 1910, fig. 8.42), John Carlson (*Silent Valleys*, c. 1920, fig. 8.43), Chauncey Ryder (*Mountain Birches*, c. 1915, fig. 8.44), and Edward Redfield, to name only a few, who matured in the heyday of Tonalism

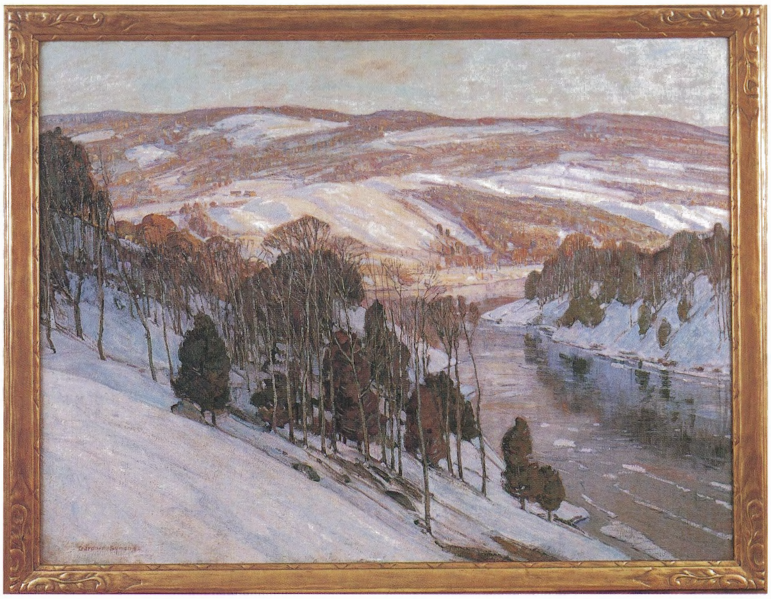


Fig. 8.42. George Gardner Symons, *Silence and Fleeting Light*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 45 x 60 in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art.

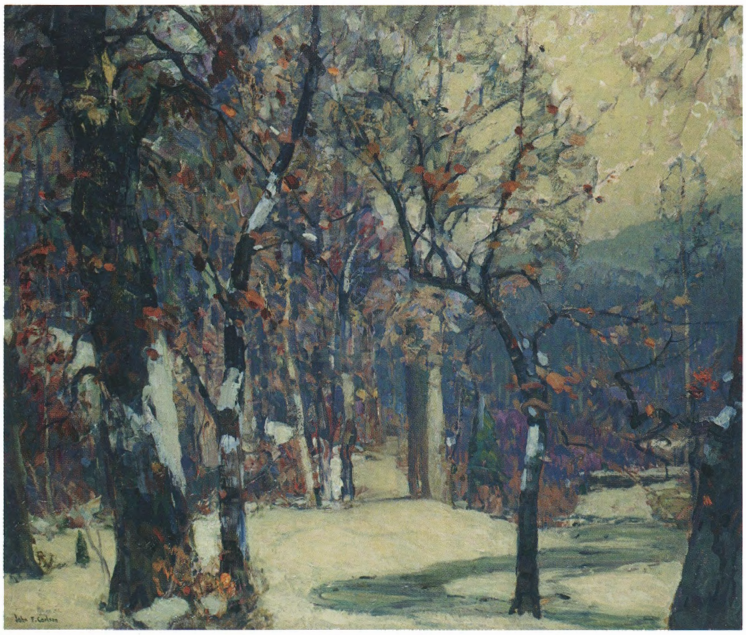


Fig. 8.43. John Carlson, *Silent Valleys*, c. 1920. Oil on canvas, 25⅛ x 30 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

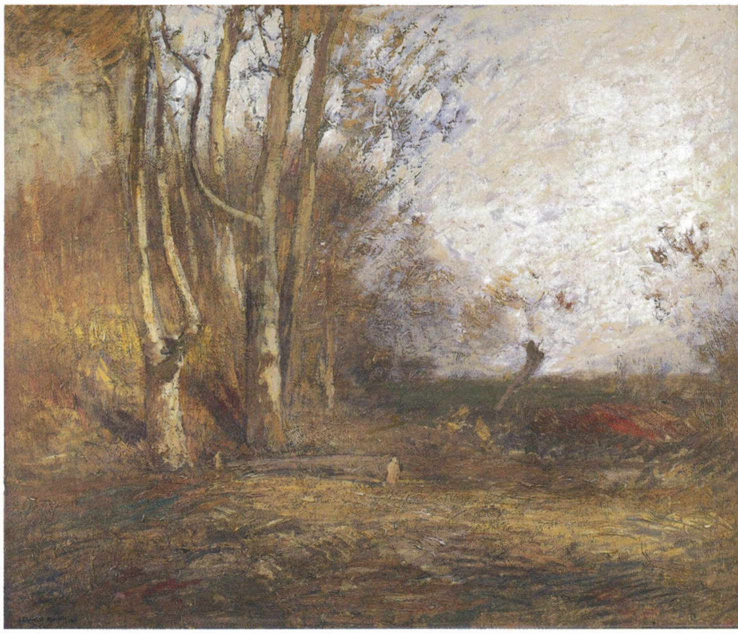
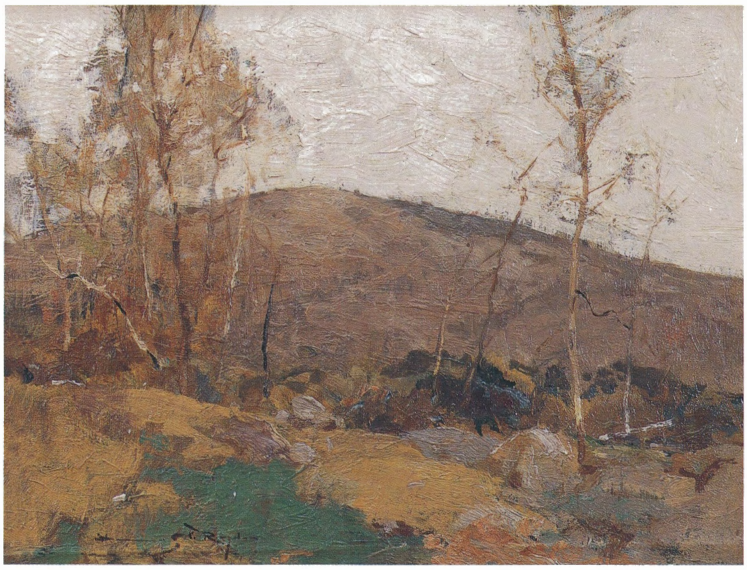


Fig. 8.45. J. Francis Murphy, *Woods Clearing*, 1914. Oil on canvas, 30 x 36 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.



8.44. Chauncey Ryder, *Mountain Birches*, c. 1915. Oil on canvas, 15 x 16 in. Private collection.

but lived well into the new century, could easily adapt in their thirties to the new, more vigorous painterly styles—and academic Impressionism—making inroads by 1905 to 1910. Many painted in a Tonalist style in their first decades as professionals and then gravitated toward a more expressive and vigorous paint handling later on (a number choosing variations on what was already, by then, an entirely cosmopolitan Impressionism). Many retained elements of a Tonalist feel for poetry and mystery, employing Impressionist facture and painting bigger, stronger, and with bravura and virtuosity—the kind of thing, according to Eliot Clark, that Sargent had made so appealing to a generation of imitators. "The general trend of the era was away from introspection, imagination, or the overtones of sentimental association. The keynote was visual realism and technical virtuosity."[91] The irony was that much of the "new" that Henri taught his students had been picked up from Whistler during Henri's years in Paris around 1900, when Whistler and his school were in ascendance: the reintroduction of black on the palette, the use of stark contrasts of light and dark, and moving the picture plane forward to emphasize the abstract design.

But the younger painters were not the only artists to be affected by the more expressive handling of paint; many Tonalists of the prime 1840-1865 generation took up the broader and more vigorous style late in their careers after 1900, many successfully integrating it with what Eliot Clark termed the "introspection, imagination, or the overtones of sentimental association" of classic Tonalism. J. Francis Murphy (*Woods Clearing*, 1914, fig. 8.45), Charles Warren Eaton, Charles Harold Davis, Frederick W. Kost, and Ben Foster managed the trick with superb results, while others, like Leonard Ochtman and Arthur Hoeber, struggled to accommodate the power of broad handling with the exquisite sensibilities that had served their youthful aspirations so well.

This development, the slow modulation from the spiritualizing realm of Aesthetic Tonalism to the more dynamic realist strain of Expressive Tonalism represented by Henri, "The Eight," and Bellows, was less a transition and more an organic growth from within the Tonalist movement itself.

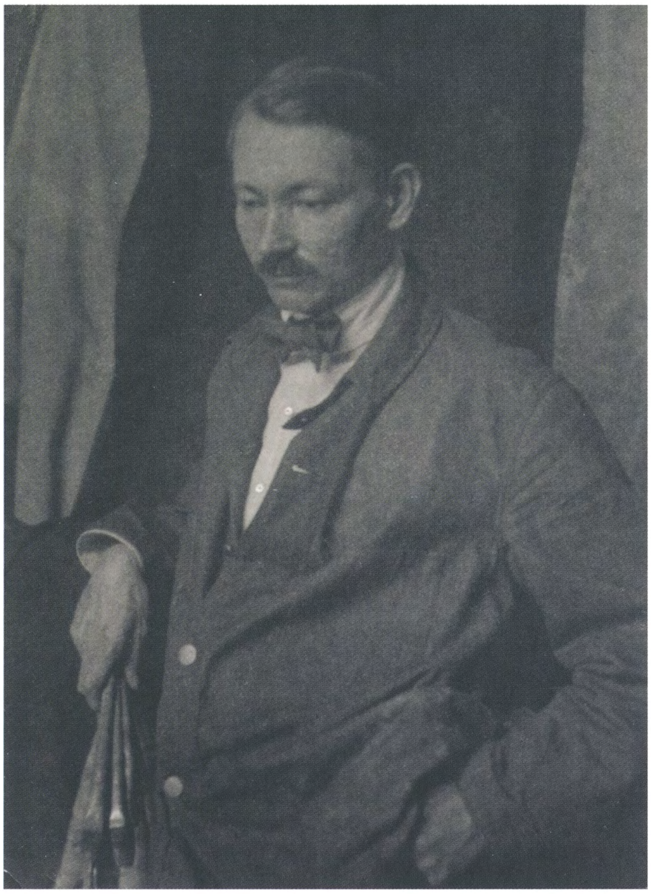


Fig. 8.46. Robert Henri, c. 1908. Courtesy 1913 Armory Show, 50th anniversary exhibition records, 1862–1963, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Eight and the Tonalist Movement

Within this context, the rise of "The Eight," or the Ashcan School, the realist painters of the American urban scene under the leadership of Robert Henri (fig. 8.46) and Arthur B. Davies, demonstrates just how formidable and ubiquitous the Tonalist movement remained in the decades after the turn of the century. In the majority of standard histories of American art the "revolt" of The Eight against the so-called academic and moribund art establishment in the guise of the National Academy of Design forms the seminal myth of the origination of the modernist movement in American art. This premise is described by art historian Bennard Perlman in his 1979 book, *The Immortal Eight.*

"Around the turn of the century, American art was at its lowest ebb.... American painting found itself in a hopeless state of nothingness. Sentimental landscapes were being produced by the hundreds with little or no resemblance to the American scene. Figure painting had deteriorated to the point where academic nudes and storybook illustrations were the order of the day. Nearly all of the prize-winning artists who sold to the best-known collectors were to fall into complete obscurity half a century later. As a result of changing taste, their paintings have long since been relegated to museum storerooms. Artists named Baudenhausen, Sichel, Begas, Wuerpel, Dessar, and Wiggins were among the popular painters in America at the turn of the century, yet not one of them has been remembered as a major contributor to the mainstream of progress... [T]hey produced nondescript landscapes in imitation of the Barbizon painters near Paris... An entire generation of artists who were capturing the prizes and selling to misdirected collectors were destined to fall into complete obscurity before their last canvases were dry.... But the biting truths of the Realists' pictorial observations could not be denied. Their determination to freely exhibit their kind of art became a virtual battle for survival. Eventually the struggle led to the overthrow of dictatorial academic policies that had impeded the progress of an indigenous American art."[92]

Perlman's otherwise fine history of Henri and his colleagues is hampered by such hyperbole and a total misreading of thirty years of art history between 1870 and 1910, as well as a bias for realist and figurative art based on Thomas Eakins's teaching and the heritage of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Perlman's narrative throughout ignores the major figures and accomplishments of the Tonalists (only Albert Pinkham Ryder and James McNeill Whistler merit even passing mention), to say nothing of the radical origins of the movement, especially the Munich tradition of expressive paint handling. The artists he names and condemns to obscurity are indeed obscure, all third-tier artists who received relatively little notice or accolades in their lifetimes. The Tonalist artists discussed in this history seem utterly unknown to Perlman.

Robert Henri, born in 1865, was on the cusp of the transition from the Tonalist generation born before 1865 and those born after, although, as will be seen, Henri in the end remained very much a product of his—the 1840–65—generation. The arc of Henri's career exemplifies that of numerous talented painters, not just his friends and colleagues in The Eight, but painters like William Redfield, Leon Dabo, and Chauncey Ryder (*Trees on the River Bend*, c. 1910, fig. 8.47). In the early 1890s, when Impressionism was on the rise in America, Henri painted with an Impressionist palette. But his early forays into Impressionism faded with the consolidation of the Tonalist movement, and the reinvigoration of Whistler's influence toward the close of the century. During an early, three-month sojourn in Venice during 1891, when Henri and his friend Edward Redfield were taking a break from study in Paris, they were influenced by the Tonalist painter William Gedney Bunce, who was resident in Venice that summer. Bunce's Expressive Tonalist style, in which he often worked with a palette knife and his fingers to achieve fantastic atmospheric effects, may well have left an enduring mark on Henri and Redfield. Bunce encouraged them to emphasize broad effects rather than detail; he also

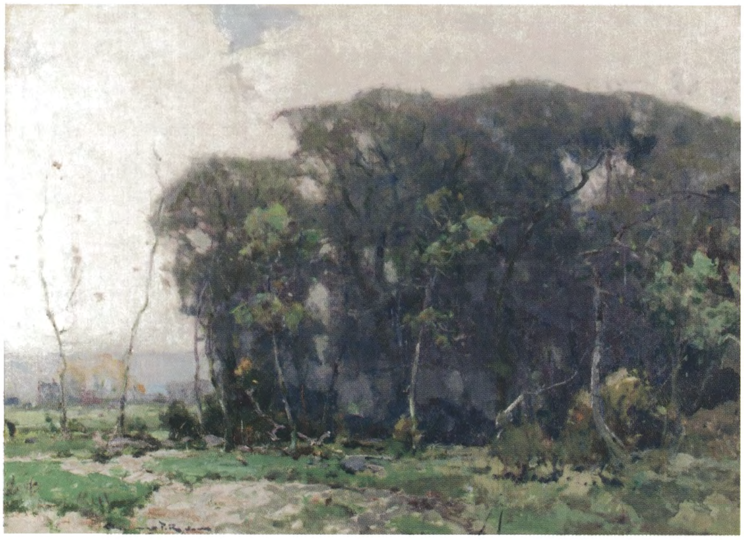


Fig. 8.47. Chauncey Ryder, *Trees on the River Bend*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 32 x 44 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

extolled Titian's expressive surfaces to the younger men, which may have played a part in developing Henri's signature style of bravura paint handling based on the old masters.[93]

Upon his return to France in the late 1890s, Henri came under the spell of Whistler and Manet, the tonal evocations of Velásquez, and the flashy brushwork of Franz Hals—precisely the same cast of characters who had inspired Munich men like Chase, Currier, Twachtman, Muhrman, and Duveneck thirty years before. Teaching and painting in Paris, Henri was so intrigued by Whistler and the rage for his method that he surreptitiously visited Whistler's atelier to assess the competition. Between 1895 and 1902, Henri painted some of the best landscape work of his career, especially his small Tonalist nocturnal renditions of Paris street life, such as *Nocturne Café*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.48), which fully embody Whistler's style and late expressive tenebrous facture. Many of these small-scale renderings of French life, either as studies or complete works in their own right, display Henri's dazzling feel for lush pigment and abstract, soft-edged forms, representational yet with surfaces that breath life and spontaneity. Rarely was he able to successfully translate such exuberance to larger landscape formats.

Returning to America with salon successes to his name (in 1899, the French government purchased *La Neige*, 1899 [Musée d'Orsay] a crepuscular Parisian snow scene) and a stellar reputation in his hometown of Philadelphia, Henri began to rapidly make his way into artistic and pedagogical circles in New York. William Merritt Chase immediately took to Henri— the younger artist was, in effect, employing the Munich tradition, of which Chase had been one of the first great exponents nearly a quarter century earlier. None other than Charles de Kay quickly picked up on Henri's reputation as an inspiring teacher and vigorous painter. In March 1902, de Kay singled out Henri's figurative painting in the annual Society of American Artists exhibition, "reminding one by its telling simplicity of coloring and by the charm of its line of figures by Whistler and Sargent." De Kay admired how wonderfully Henri's style reads: "[F]rom a distance the picture beckons. It is so odd, so graceful, so simple in coloring, so powerfully marked out upon its background."[94] For de Kay and his generation, Henri combined a spellbinding tonal finesse with expressive handling that represented, if anything, a reinvigoration of the Tonalist tradition after the Impressionist inroads of the mid-1890s.

A few weeks later, in a Macbeth Gallery showing of seventeen of Henri's works, de Kay expounded on the essence of Henri's style: "One sees the same style of brushwork, broad and calculated for long distances. . . . We are used to this way of bold broad handling in high tones and in out-of-door trials at effects of sunlight on flowers; it is rarer that one sees the method applied on lower keys of color and with a very restricted range—browns, blacks, grays, dull yellows, whites. As in his brushwork, so in his coloring, Mr. Robert Henri utters an individual note." De Kay was particularly enthusiastic about Henri's landscapes, landscapes that needed large viewing areas to be properly read by the viewer. "The brush strokes are an inch broad and when one is near the picture the paint seems like lava which is arrested as it flows; but step back a bit and presently the landscape and sky resolve themselves into a fine and perfect scene with all the values of color delicately adjusted. . . . Settled at present in New York, he is painting and teaching with commendable industry, and seems to possess all the qualities that belong to the youth of strong masters."[95]

As he had more than twenty years before, explaining the brilliant "unfinished" (to the untutored eye) bravura brushwork of J. Frank Currier, John Twachtman, and Henry Muhrman to his readers, de Kay went about educating a new generation on the vigorous tonal exuberance of Henri. Two years later, in 1904, de Kay was instrumental in mounting a show of Henri and his followers—Sloan, Luks, Glackens, Davies, and Prendergast—at the National Arts Club, which de Kay had founded with William Evans. He said of the exhibition, "Yet this is work that gives a great deal of enjoyment both to those who denounce it as the degeneracy of silly minds and those who regard it as the last screech of genius. A little exhibition in the National Arts Club contains work of this debated kind and gives rise to the most exquisite diatribes against and hymns of praise in honor of the artists represented." De Kay obviously took great pleasure in keeping the art kettle boiling, as well as lecturing to his fellow club members and to his readers on the value of Henri and his cohorts of young, emerging artists. "With few exceptions they represent the vigorous school of picture-making which tries to get the objects on the canvas before the enthusiasm that caused their selection has had time to evaporate and the red-hot impression time to cool." Although

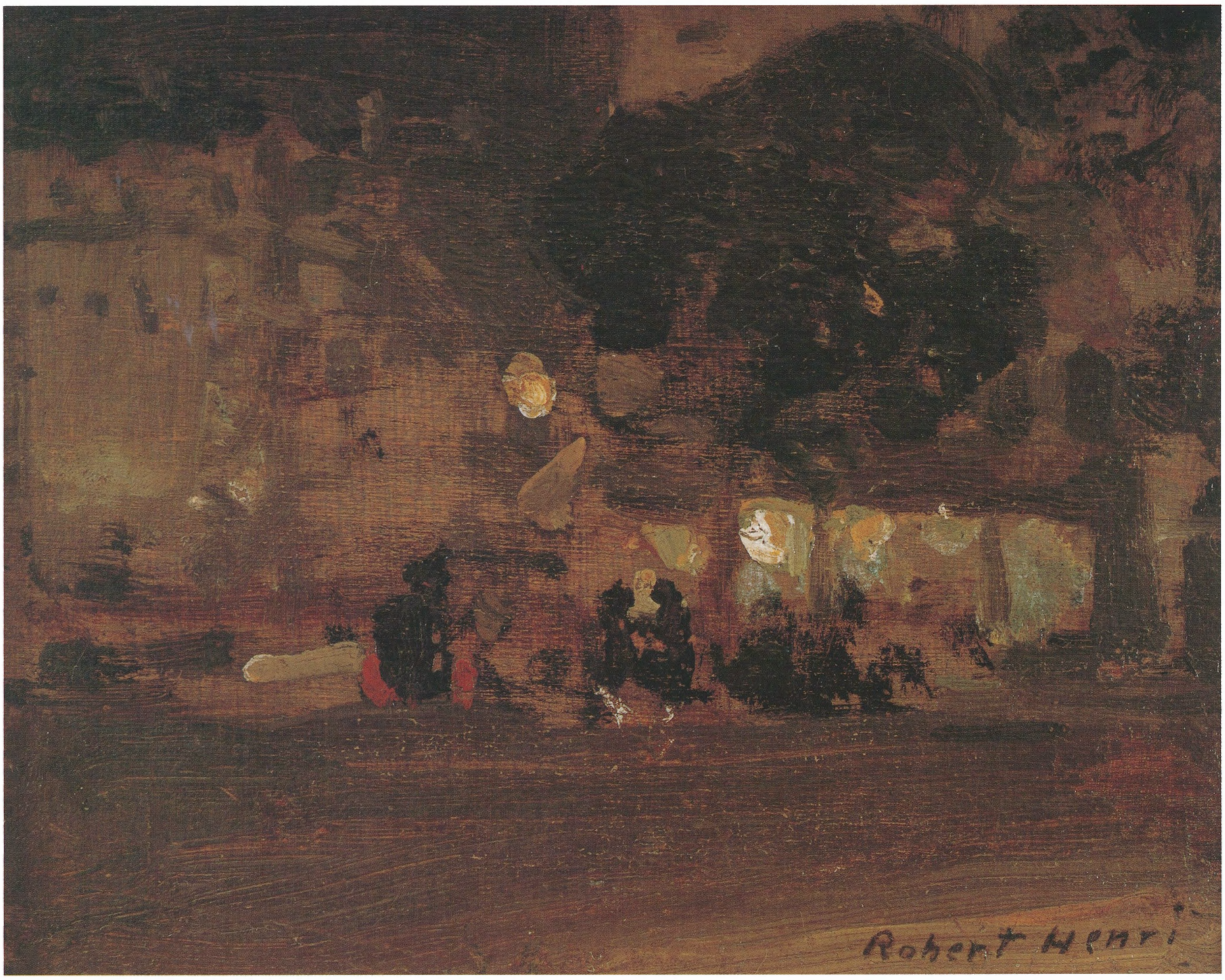


Fig. 8.48. Robert Henri, *Nocturne Café*, c. 1900. Oil on board, 4½ x 5¼ in. Private collection.

de Kay terms the style of brushwork employed by Henri's circle Impressionist for its vigor and attempt to capture the energy of the moment, he constantly compares Henri and Glackens with Whistler's low-toned figurative and landscape work, noting of the younger artists' work, "indistinct outlines . . . subdued tones . . . restrained color schemes." The delight that de Kay takes in the controversy he has helped stir up is captured at the close of his review of the exhibition: "A collection like this has the most enlivening effect on the beholders; no one can remain indifferent; it is either admiration or damnation, and the style of most of the paintings is such as to demand an instant decision. If the end of the month is reached without duels the club is in luck."[96]

For de Kay, Henri and his young colleagues represented less a radical break with the Tonalist tradition than an extension of an ongoing progressive movement, which he had been promoting for thirty years. It was, in effect, a reinvigoration of that tradition as it made the transition from Aesthetic Tonalism to Expressive Tonalism—and in the case of The Eight, it propagated a new kind of realism. This, too, represented for de Kay the very American dynamic he always called for, which placed a premium on individuality, freedom of expression, and deep emotional commitment to art—above all, the communication of feeling that had been central to Inness as far back at the 1870s.

It is notable that de Kay, with his National Arts Club exhibition, had showcased for the New York art world what Henri was advocating a full three years before Henri's break with the National Academy of Design in 1907, and the exhibition of work by The Eight at Macbeth (Henri's dealer since 1902) in 1908. In the meantime, Henri, with backing from the likes of de Kay and others, was being shown at the Society of American Artists, not only becoming a member but also a member of the jury of selection, encouraging his friends and students to submit work, and fighting for their inclusion in the society's annual exhibitions. Henri quickly became such an insider that he was part of the committee elected by the society to deal with the issues of merging the society and the academy in 1906. By 1907, Henri was a member of the jury of the conjoined organizations, the jury that would select the work for the first amalgamated exhibition of the two groups. Henri was hardly the pariah of myth, the radical outsider who steamrolled the moribund New York art establishment. Beneath the brash call to arms for his brand of realism and depiction of the here-and-now, he was very much a late-nineteenth-century man. He idolized William Morris Hunt's *Art Talks* (and its phraseology of Emersonian uplift), often quoting directly from Hunt and paraphrasing many of Hunt's aphorisms to his students. Henri's collected exhortations to students in his 1923 *The Art Spirit* seems in both form and character to be lifted straight from Hunt's *Art Talks*, although Henri dealt less with technique and more with the creative energies to be harnessed by high self-regard. ("Cherish your own emotions and never undervalue them. We are not here to do what has already been done. I have little interest in teaching you what I know. I wish to stimulate you to tell me what *you* know."[97])

In many respects, Henri's style, bowing often to Thoreau's laconic syntax, was simply an extrapolation of Hunt's principles for a broad and expressive manner of painting, stressing form over line and dramatic juxtapositions of light and dark so that pictures read well at a distance. Henri loved Emerson and Whitman and was deeply immersed in the literary culture of the Transcendentalists. Emotionally and artistically, Henri was deeply attached to the fundamental tenants of the Tonalist movement as it was evolving around the turn of the century. He was less interested in reinventing the wheel than pushing the existing tradition to better express the exuberance of twentieth-century life in paint. The brouhaha of 1907–08 was more about pique, pride, and personality, and if anything, a struggle between generations of figurative artists, since it was the figurative artists in 1907, the portraitists and genre painters, who lagged behind the more inventive and often more daring ranks of the Tonalist landscape artists, especially those garnering the highest prices in the art market.

The 1907–08 "revolt" of The Eight against the National Academy was precipitated by a clash of opinion between Henri and his colleagues on the jury of selection for the Annual Spring Exhibition in 1907. Henri took exception to two of his portraits being given a "2" ranking by the jury (Henri then withdrew them) and a Luks portrait that received a barely passing "3." The Henri portraits and Luks figurative work were more likely downgraded by the figurative painters on the jury, led by Kenyon Cox (long a whipping boy of Charles de Kay), who is reported to have condemned Luks's *Man with Dyed Mustachios* with a shouted "To hell with it." After the hanging committee had winnowed out another 250 accepted works because of a lack of space, including the Luks portrait, Henri went to the press with his smoldering frustrations. He proceeded to build a case of discrimination on the part of the jury and the National Academy, abetted by the press, which was always delighted to latch onto controversy and a good fight. Henri's pique was framed as a generational battle: a graying, over-the-hill art establishment blocking the rise of hot-blooded young men who wanted to portray real life in all its vibrant and vivid detail.

There was a modicum of fact behind the charges made against the National Academy, even after it had absorbed the young radicals of the late 1870s who made up the best of the society. Old-line figurative painters like Cox, who painted stultifying idealized nudes, the kind of thing de Kay hated, did indeed object to some of the subjects of Henri and his followers, either because of the indelicate subject matter or the slap-dash style employed. But most of the jury members, many of whom were Tonalist landscape painters, were probably indifferent to the issue; the landscapists were thriving with record prices and prizes coming their way, and the controversy with Henri probably seemed, at least to the landscape painters, more a tempest in teapot among their figurative colleagues. In retrospect, jury members and Tonalist landscapists like Ben Foster, Henry Snell, J. F. Murphy, and Emil Carlsen produced more radical, if not more interesting work, than Henri and many of his cohorts. If the Tonalists objected to Henri and The Eight at all, it probably had more to do with the reintroduction of narrative elements into art—the crux of the realist cause in an age of social and political reform, which would have been anathema to the Whistlerian tradition of art for art's sake, now established for almost three decades. Whistler's Nocturnes of the Thames certainly depicted unsightly stretches of working-class Chelsea, but the denizens made few appearances. If anything, many on the 1907 jury, landscapists and portraitists alike, may have felt the so-called realists in Henri's circle showed too much of their origin and training as illustrators (storytellers), and were, in effect, reproducing reality more than interpreting reality.

The post-Munich, or perhaps retro-Munich, style of vigorous and flashy pigment handling employed by Henri and The Eight—what Eliot Clark, in his history of the National Academy, described as "Manet replacing Monet"—would not in itself have offended a generation weaned on the achievements of Whistler, Duveneck, Chase, and Currier in the 1870s, though some of the criticism against George Luks's more extreme paint handling has an uncanny echo of negative criticism against Currier in the late 1870s. When such expressive brushwork was used by landscapists like Ernest Lawson (*Madison Square Park*, c. 1905, fig. 8.49), Arthur Davies, and especially George Bellows, it rarely drew negative criticism.

Most members of the National Academy probably felt that Henri, in a self-serving maneuver, had turned the inevitable controversies and friction that marked any jury process to benefit his colleagues and students. Nevertheless, Henri's rejection of the academy, the revolt of 1907, and the exhibition of The Eight at the Macbeth Gallery in 1908 has been interpreted by many as the advent of modernism in America. In reality, the

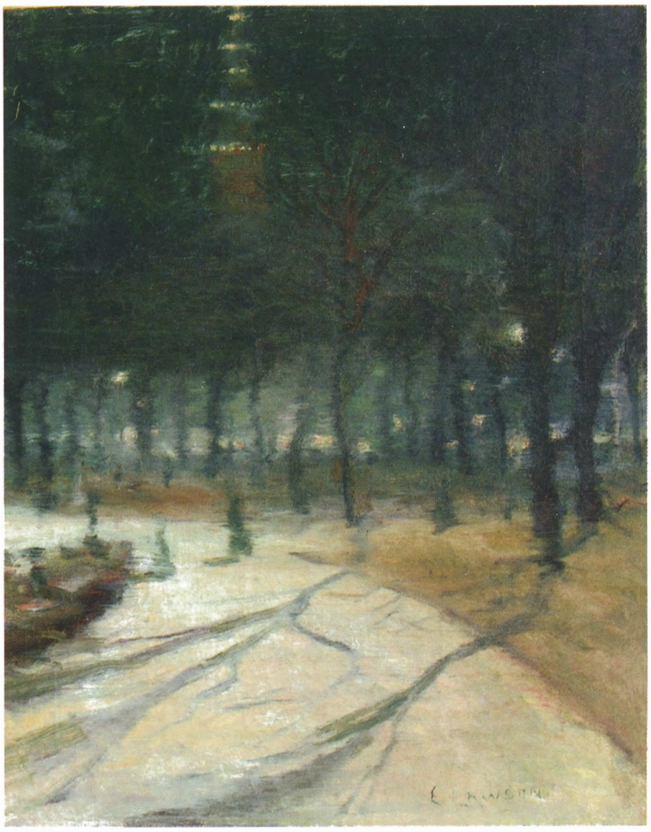


Fig. 8.49. Ernest Lawson, *Madison Square Park*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in. Courtesy Boston Art Club.

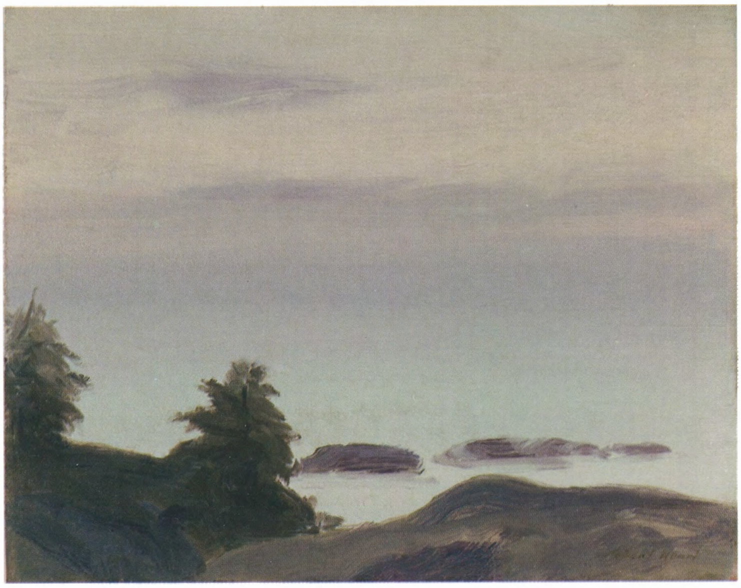


Fig. 8.50. Robert Henri, *Evening Mist, Monhegan*, 1911. Oil on panel, 11¹³⁄₁₆ x 15 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

roots of modernism had long been prepared by the Tonalists going back to the late 1870s, the very milieu out of which Henri and his circle emerged. The Eight, nurtured on Tonalism in the 1890s, retained most of the stylistic aspects of tonal painting as practiced in 1900 and up to and beyond 1910—although Maurice Prendergast pursued his broken-form modernism and William Glackens switched to a higher keyed, full-blown Impressionism toward the end of the decade. By reviving aspects of the realist tradition in American painting, particularly that espoused by Eakins, The Eight eschewed some aspects of the Tonalist style in terms of its more spiritual, abstract, and decorative elements—precisely the elements that the Stieglitz circle would come to embrace. In the realm of landscape, a comparison between the major Tonalist exponents and the landscape work of The Eight, demonstrates considerably more than a family resemblance between the two.

On the 1907 academy jury with Henri was Ben Foster who, a year after Henri, had also sold a landscape to the Musée du Luxembourg in 1900, *Bercé par le murmure d'un ruisseau* (*Lulled by a Murmuring Stream*, Musée d'Orsay), painted in 1899 (see fig. 5.124). Although worlds apart, Henri's snowy scene in Paris, *La Neige*, 1899, a deeply somber canvas employing Whistler's "soup" method, resonates emotionally with Foster's moonlit Connecticut village, full of haunting shadows and crepuscular forms. The French, presumably, found Henri and Foster very much in the forefront of the Whistlerian mode of landscape: tonal nocturnes displaying a psychological complexity and Symbolist overtones, very much in keeping with the Symbolist landscapes that were found in profusion at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900. Henri recognized that his Whistlerian low-toned style, though cutting edge, was still a risk in Paris in 1900; in fact he failed to get any of his four portraits and one café night scene accepted into the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900—a failure he attributed to the overcast days during which the jury was reviewing submissions: "One of the unfortunate things was that during the judgment of the pictures it was always dark, either fog or rain—a very bad condition for dark-toned pictures to be seen in. I prayed for clear weather but it came too late."[98]

Upon his return to America, Henri continued to paint low-toned nocturnal scenes of New York, or snowy views in overcast weather until 1902 when he switched to follow more lucrative work in portraiture. His later landscapes painted in Maine, Ireland, and Spain are full of spontaneity, vigor, and joyous exuberance in the bravura handling of raw pigment. *Evening Mist, Monhegan*, 1911 (fig. 8.50), demonstrates Henri's further exploration of the expressive power and simplicity of the Tonalist mode, moving closer to pure abstraction and a stark rendering of symbolic landforms. Compared to the late work of Foster, and other 1907 jurors like Frederick W. Kost and J. Francis Murphy, Henri's late landscapes display superb technical vigor and dash, but in certain respects eschew the deep, expressive power and more formal abstraction of the older artists. Nevertheless, Henri, too, drew on the radical tradition of the previous decades and exploited the logic of abstraction that was rooted in the Tonalist movement.

Members of The Eight such as Lawson and Davies were fairly conventional in their Tonalist landscape work through

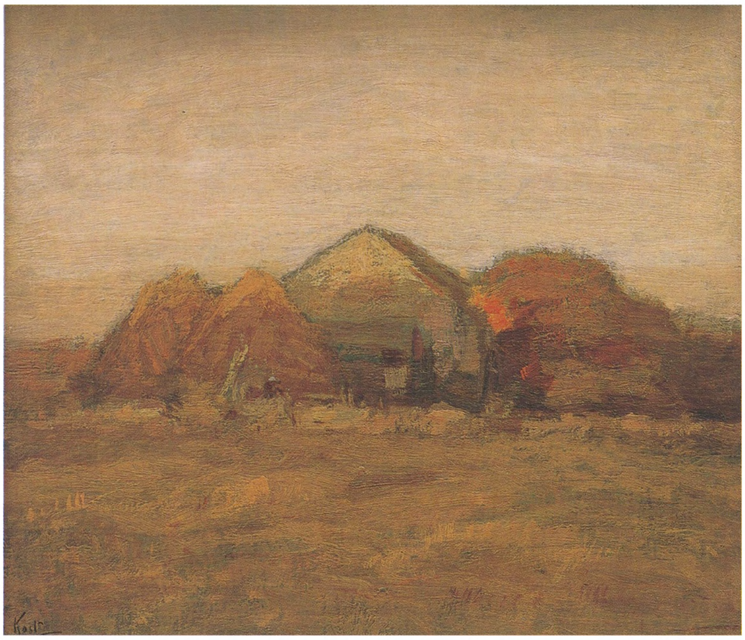


Fig. 8.51. Frederick W. Kost, *A Buzzards Bay Farm*, c. 1910. Oil on board, 9 x 10 in. Private collection.

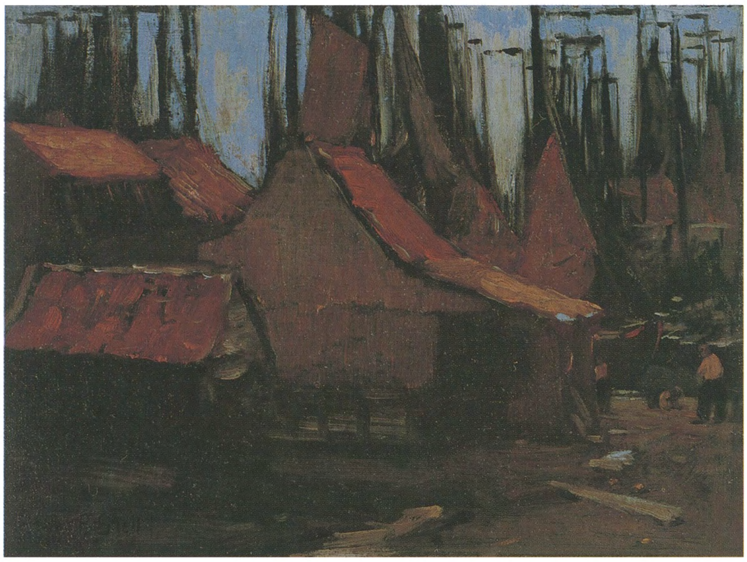


Fig. 8.52. Henry Snell, *Red Roofs and Sails*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas board, 7 x 9 in. Private collection.

1910. Lawson became even more conventional and loosely Impressionist later, unlike Davies who went on to create his greatest abstract landscapes in his Tonalist watercolors after 1920 (see figs. 5.47, 5.48). Other academy jurors in 1907, like Frederick W. Kost (who was on the 1907 hanging committee that failed to hang Luks's portrait) moved on to produce extraordinary abstract landscapes (*A Buzzards Bay Farm*, c. 1910, fig. 8.51), employing all the verve of paint handling of Henri at his best, often with a degree of formal abstraction and decorative interest that Henri—or Lawson—rarely achieved. Henry Snell, also on the 1907 jury, was a consummate landscape artist, inveterate experimenter, especially in watercolor, and painted fascinating and complex landscape abstractions, such as *Yellow Coast*, circa 1905 (see fig. 6.56), and harbor views like *Red Roofs and Sails*, circa 1905 (fig. 8.52), displaying elaborate formal design and complex tonal dexterity in a juxtaposition of foreground and background shapes, positive and negative spaces, that verge on the two-dimensional. Another jury member, Emil Carlsen was one of the most exquisite technicians and handlers of paint in his generation, and his landscapes and still lifes combine a fidelity to nature with an abstract grace and decorative flair second to none.

Other major Tonalists not on the 1907 jury like Dwight Tryon, Albert Ryder, J. Alden Weir, Charles Warren Eaton, and Charles Melville Dewey could handle paint with great Expressionist vitality and subtle abstraction, often probing emotional depths and formal complexities rarely touched on by members of The Eight. If The Eight can be described as having broken with the establishment, they most certainly broke with the antiquated figurative and genre artists like Kenyon Cox and J.G. Brown, not to mention the Boston Impressionists, members of the Ten: Benson, Tarbell, and de Camp, and their depictions of upper-class life styles.

Reviews of The Eight's 1908 exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery ranged from respectful to dismissive to mildly shocked by what, even in de Kay's opinion, might be considered inappropriate subject matter for the home parlor. A Puritan prudishness certainly came into play for those who found realistic nudes shocking, or lower-class subjects unacceptable for polite society. Charles de Kay, who had heartily enjoyed his show of Henri's circle at the National Arts Club in 1904, expressed some reservations as to subject matter but was encouraged in 1908 by what he saw as a healthy debate. "Join the throng that fills the elevator to the Macbeth sky parlors and if you do not remain to pray, you will surely remain to curse. . . . There is no going to sleep over the sallies and whimsies of the Eight Painters. . . . Whether it be an abstraction put in a clumsy way by Mr. Davies, or a bit of rollicking fun by Mr. Luks, or a clever piece of instantaneous observation in a hippodrome by Mr. Shinn, there is a live man behind the brush."[99] Henri and his press supporters promoted the show with terms like "revolt," "rebellion," and "secession" (still loaded terms for those who remembered the Civil War), not to mention the tried-and-true appeal to American patriotism—just as de Kay had done twenty years earlier—claiming progressive American values in their depiction of real life.

Critics responded with a good dose of skepticism, sometimes praising the innovatory aspects of some artists, but often crying foul, pointing out the French influence in much of the work, especially the standard-fair Impressionism of Glackens and others. Noted one critic, "Surely it is not 'revolutionary' to follow in the footsteps of the men who were the rage in artistic Paris twenty years ago."[100] Another reviewer, James B. Townsend, had been around long enough to remember the controversies surrounding an earlier group of artists, and found the brouhaha around Macbeth's 1908 show "reminiscent to older art writers and lovers of that fateful day, thirty years ago—my, how time flies—when the Society of American Artists astonished the then smaller Metropolis at the American Art Galleries. The present writer recalls too well his youthful and harsh criticism of the 'Munich Men' of that day, [Currier, Chase, Twachtman, Duveneck] as they were called, and his predictions of their dark future—predictions which were not in most cases fulfilled—to rashly animadvert upon the present advent of 'The Eight' to predict either future success or oblivion for their members. He has seen the despised 'Munich Men' of 1878 develop, with few exceptions, into our sanest and strongest painters of today, and the movement they instituted change and better the conditions of American art to a surprising degree. That 'The Eight' have among them strong painters cannot be denied, and the impulse and impression their first show may have upon present art conditions who can say?"[101]

It is noteworthy that William Macbeth, who hosted the 1908 exhibition of The Eight, saw nothing revolutionary in its character, neither a break with the past nor anything particularly controversial, only another way of packaging his more adventurous painters, especially Arthur Davies, who sold very well for him (albeit to a single patron, Lizzie [also known as Lillie] P. Bliss). From Macbeth's perspective, realism per se, depicting the American scene or the spirit of the age, did not signify a break with prevailing tradition. Almost all his artists were employing the tenets of Whistlerian formalism in one way or another, whether in portraits, genre works, or landscape. However, from the vantage point of a hundred years later, the stylistic affinities between The Eight and their Tonalist colleagues are more pronounced than the differences, subject matter aside. The Eight employed Tonalist compositional strategies to heighten and project narrative drama, the Tonalist landscapists to project symbolic carrying power.

By almost any estimation, the strongest work of The Eight was probably the members' early work of 1895–1910, when they were fully engaged by the Tonalist mode. In retrospect, the rise of The Eight can be regarded as less an outbreak of modernism or radicalism, and more the development of a vital realist strain from within the Tonalist movement—an adjunct to Expressive Tonalism. The political and social overtones of The Eight would in time evolve into liberal and conservative camps, especially in the 1930s with the rise of Social Realism and the regionalist movement (painters of the American scene), culminating in realism's greatest exponent, Edward Hopper. The coming tide of European modernism in the Amory Show of 1913 would further complicate, if not obliterate, stylistic distinctions among the American artists born in the decade around 1865.

If anything, the controversy around The Eight probably hastened the departure of the elder antediluvians from the academy. In the academy exhibition of 1908 (the academy seemed to be making amends by hanging members of The Eight together on one wall)—coming on the heels of the exhibition, *The Eight*, at the Macbeth Gallery—de Kay found much to admire everywhere he looked, calling it "the best exhibition that that institution has held in many years . . . Certain it is that a new and more active spirit is at work within the Academy." De Kay, a dyed-in-the-wool Darwinian, was only too delighted to find that the old academic genre pictures had succumbed to the new—what he ridiculed as the conventional academic picture, a "Breaking Home Ties" type of genre. He had scorned such works in his reviews for decades. What really caught de Kay's eye was "the amazingly clever canvas by George Bellows, called 'North River' . . . In its truthfulness of observation and in its painterlike qualities this is the best piece of work produced by this young man so far." After praising Ernest Lawson, de Kay writes, "Thus every rebel has his day, and we look to the newcomers to stir our pulse and keep the good fight going. Such a chap is Bellows and Rockwell Kent. . . . One must not forget, however, such men as Ben Foster, in whom resides a fine sense of the poetic aspects of nature . . . Mr. Foster's work has a persuasive power of evocation seldom to be found in the work of to-day."[102]

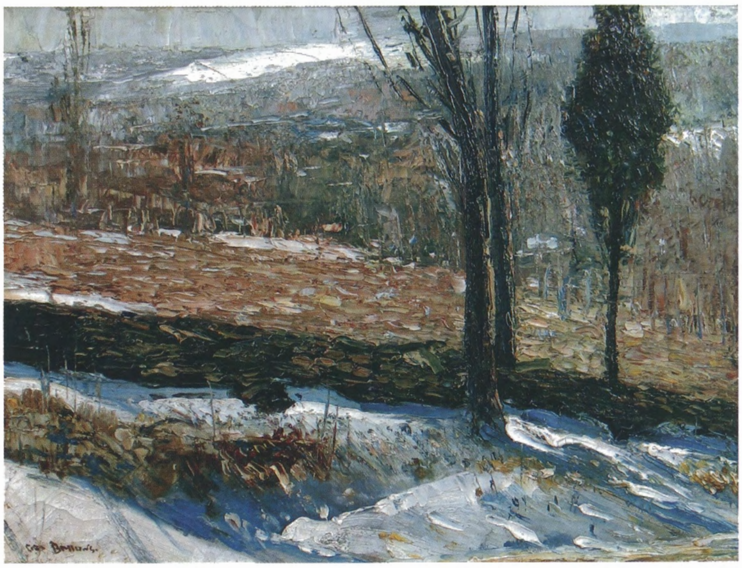


Fig. 8.53. George W. Bellows, *The Stone Fence*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in. Private collection. Courtesy Godel & Co. Fine Art, New York.

Here, through de Kay's eyes, we catch a glimpse of the fragile fault line of distinction between two generations, those born before 1865 and those after: Foster's poetic and persuasive power of evocation contrasted with Bellow's powerful truthfulness of observation and wristy paint handling, such as *The Stone Fence*, 1909 (fig. 8.53). It is within this context, that we can better grasp the organic growth of Henri's energized art of the here-and-now as it emerges from the quieter introspection and spiritual values of the Tonalist heritage, a change not so much in style as in intent.

From a present-day perspective, the gritty urban subject matter of Henri and his followers is less about revolt and more about the reinvigoration of the realist tradition in American going back to Twachtman's and Muhrman's scenes of New York in the late 1870s. For de Kay and Ben Foster's generation, if they had strong reservations about the indelicate bravura realism of The Eight, it may have had as much to do with the movement's revival of narrative storytelling painting in a modern guise as it did with Henri's rejection of the effete and effeminate abstract and formal values of the aesthetic movement—the art for art's sake philosophy which Henri replaced with "art for life's sake." In modern parlance, much of Henri's encouragement to his students was about telling (big brushes, lots of pigment, and prodigious elbow grease), while for the older generation, authenticity lay in showing, expressing a deeply held sentiment—by whatever means—through the imaginative temperament of the artist. Something, too, of their origins as newspaper illustrators always hung over members of The Eight (with the exception of Prendergast and Davies), leaving them open to accusations of sentimentality and worse. This was precisely, from de Kay's perspective, what had hampered Homer's development for more than twenty years, until, with his late painting of the churning sea and crashing waves, Homer achieved his greatest masterpieces, doing so by placing formal values and decorative exuberance, along with the scintillating use of color, ahead of storytelling.

The Eight may have revived interest in realism in 1908 but the old guard Tonalists still had much to offer. If there is a year when the Tonalist movement and the generation of 1840–65 reached its high-water mark, it may be that by 1909, when every major Tonalist was represented at the Venice Biennale—from Wyant and Martin, of the first generation born before 1840, to Blakelock, Bunce, Dewing, Davis, Foster, Ranger, and many others, including the post-1865 generation of artists like Bellows, Henri, and Redfield. As de Kay noted in the *New York Times* about the artists represented in Venice, "Sixteen were born in the fifties, fifteen in the sixties, three in the seventies, and only one in the eighties. Two (Wyant and Martin) date back to the forties. If the young men are conspicuous by their absence the same is true of the old men, and the representation is almost wholly confined to those of middle years."[103] By 1909, the majority of the Tonalists would be in their fifties and like most artists, happily reproducing their signature style, while a few like Murphy, Foster, and Kost extended their reach, challenging themselves to plumb the depths of their artistry. As has been seen with the Evans sale of 1913, and other sales up to and beyond 1918, the major figures in the Tonalist movement were bringing in enormous prices, but few were sustaining the quality and freshness of their work in the decade after 1900.

In the following year, 1910, Charles de Kay organized a fascinating exhibition at the National Arts Club of contemporary landscape painting in which the generational shift became clear, as the second, or core, generation of Tonalists born between 1840 and 1865 aged and their powers declined. De Kay offered a fine valedictory summation of the watershed accomplishments of the Tonalist School of landscape as it began to be replaced by the succeeding generation, noting the contrasting styles between the Tonalists, as exemplified by Charles Warren Eaton, and the vigorous realism of his younger contemporaries Robert Henri and George Bellows. De Kay used the yardstick of the French Barbizon master Jean-François Millet by which to measure the accomplishments of modern American landscapists: "Millet is reported to have said on frequent occasions, 'the end of the day is the test of a picture.' By this he meant that in twilight the colors in a picture are merged in the masses of light and dark, the details are subordinated also to these masses, and it is possible to judge whether the values of a picture, which are its very soul and body, are properly related. To quote his own words in a letter to Sensier, Millet wrote: 'If a sketch seen in the dim half light at the end of the day have the requisite balance—*pondération*—it is a picture; if not, no clever arrangement of color, no skill in drawing or elaborate finish, can ever make it into a picture.' This is the essence of the matter, and if we bring strictly to this test the majority of the landscapes painted by the Barbizon men with whom Millet was associated and the majority of the landscapes painted by Americans working under the influence of that school and by later Americans working under the influence of the Impressionist school, they will be found wanting; but the minority which stand the test are the masterpieces of landscape art."[104]

De Kay, in championing Millet's time-honored emphasis on well-balanced values, extols the basic credo of Tonalism: a well-crafted painting employs a unified tonal structure of harmoniously organized and related colors, creating a composition that reads instantly, tellingly, and even dramatically at a distance. Writing of the same 1910 exhibition, de Kay notes: "This dignity of justly related values once gained, however, many things may be added to a picture to enhance its pictorial beauty, and naturally the richer it is in appropriate felicities the more pleasure it yields on long acquaintance." Employing this criterion, de Kay moves on to critique contemporary artists. "It is interesting to turn, for example, from such a stately, tranquil canvas as that by Charles Warren Eaton, '*Evening in Connecticut*' (see fig. 7.40) all made up of horizontals and perpendiculars arranged in accordance with a noble convention, to such a lusty piece of realism as Robert Henri's 'Maine Coast.'" De Kay praises Henri's vigor and continues to single out other successes he finds: in Ernest Lawson, "The unity of the impression is singularly complete . . . there is substance in it and durability; it feeds our memory if not our imagination." Comparing a George Bellows snow scene to Eaton, de Kay remarks that the "Bellows is much less rhythmic in the balance of its lines and masses. . . . Yet in structural composition it is no less architectonic than Mr. Eaton's." In Bellows he sees "nature so frankly seen, so joyously interpreted, so satisfactory in its coordinated images and pure, powerful, vital color. . . . " It is a painting, de Kay says, that "stirs such healthy delight in the splendid physical world. No one can do much brooding in the presence of such a picture." [105] De Kay closes his discussion by comparing the Tonalist heritage of Millet, represented by Eaton's *Evening in Connecticut*, with the raw power and verve of the upcoming generation of The Eight, reflecting on what is gained and what may be lost. He notes the virtues of Whistler's less-is-more doctrine: "Painters of a synthetic habit incorporate very few things, but exercise a rigid selection and manage, when they are competent, to suggest much more that way." In what can be described as a eulogy for Tonalism, de Kay recognizes that the new generation, characterized by Henri and Glackens, may have foregone a technical resource but gained a new sympathy for the commonplace. "The Millets in art are few in number, but the time has come around for an artist to whom humanity furnishes a genuine inspiration. The painters of the present moment, as full of cheer as Millet was of gloom, as impressed by the gayety and interest of life as he was by its weariness and by the immortal 'lachrymae rerum,' are on the way toward making modern art a thing to grip the affections . . . [T]he question is one of change rather than progression. No great art ever can be bettered or repeated in another age."[106]

Like many of the artists about whom he wrote in 1910, de Kay was more than sixty years old and his ruminations speak to his generation and the watershed of one era passing as a new age came into being. Yet, in the closing words of his review, in which he describes this transition as one of change rather than progression, pointing out how great art cannot be bettered or repeated but retains an eternal or classic relevance across the ages, de Kay offers both a poet's felicitous sense of metamorphosis and the meticulous insights of an acolyte of Darwin: it is a vision of nature that is ever changing but remains changeless in the eye of the beholder, whose brief season allows only a fragmentary glimpse into the heart of things. In this peculiar and sometimes querulous mix of resignation, exhilaration, and profound joy he was very much attuned to his times. His Barbizon "gloom" echoes the dolorous reflections on the modern age of writers like Henry Adams in his archly dark *Education*, and even the thoughts of John La Farge who, in a series of lectures he gave in 1908 entitled *The Higher Life in Art*, wrote: "The melancholy born of failure in fitting the issues of the world to one's own desires turns naturally into contemplation of that over which we have no control—that nature which continues undisturbed by the vicissitudes of man."[107]

Whereas Tonalism may have served as an antidote to the traumatic changes of the post–Civil War period, the various Post-Impressionist styles, including the vigorous realism of The Eight, may have suited a younger generation more willing to embrace those changes in the years before World War I. A sense of that rising generation's new acceptance of and enthusiasm for American art can be found in a 1913 article in the *New York Times* by Joseph Pennell, a Tonalist printmaker, illustrator, and biographer of Whistler. "But a few years ago and no one would look at an American picture or look at, save patronizingly, an American painter. . . . But now we cannot produce American pictures fast enough, and we cannot give enough encouragement to our painters. A few artists have left Europe and come home, but these expatriates are considered rather as interloper and interferers with the real American painter, the heaven-sent, home-bred genius, especially if he happens to hail from the east side of New York. A few years ago—after the death of the Hudson River School—it was discovered that there was nothing picturesque or paintable in America—no art atmosphere, no encouragement—it was forgotten for a time there was scarce an artist. Today everything is not only paintable, but there is nothing outside the country worth looking at, and if one does not immediately acknowledge every Western boom village or moribund Eastern city to be finer than Athens or just like Venice, one is a traitor to art and to one's country."[108] Although Pennell might be engaging in a certain level of hyperbole, to which he was prone, his perspective on the transformation of American art of the period 1880 to 1913, through which he had lived and labored, was largely accurate and reflects the new energy and enthusiasm for the homegrown artistic product in the years before World War I. The great irony for Pennell and his generation of Tonalists is that in the very year when he was writing—at the very moment when the American Tonalists thought themselves fully established in their own right, free of European influence, in fact superior to the European article, certainly in terms of landscape art—the Armory Show of 1913 and the landslide of European modernism changed everything. The Armory Show of 1913 provided a whole new series of challenges for American art and artists, challenges that would ultimately bury Tonalism and revive America's feeling of cultural inferiority over the following decades until the 1950s, when the advent of Abstract Expressionism finally put America again in the forefront of the international art scene.

Tonalism across America: New York to Boston, Old Lyme, Woodstock, Philadelphia, New Hope, and California

By 1900 and the subsequent decade, New York was firmly at the center of the American art scene, home to the major artists of the Tonalist movement—or at least their urban studios, dealers, schools, auction houses, and an expanding Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was a golden age for the city and American art. Boston and Philadelphia had developed independent artistic centers, soon to be followed by Chicago and San Francisco, but New York had incubated the Tonalist style—embracing Whistler's early and late modes of Aesthetic and Expressive Tonalism—and its greatest practitioners lived and worked within a short train ride of the city. The economics of the art world was established for the new century. After 1900 most of Tonalism's subject matter was found on American shores, and almost all of it within two hundred miles of New York: the New Hope area along the Delaware River north of Philadelphia, the low-lying hills and marshlands of New Jersey along the lower Hudson River, and north to the Catskills and Connecticut hills, out along the coastal reaches of Long Island Sound—and numerous artist colonies on Long Island itself—and including a broad swath of New England from Buzzards Bay to Massachusetts' North Shore and beyond to the Green Mountains of Vermont and the White Mountains of New Hampshire. These were the summer haunts of the artists and their well-off patrons. Summer art schools soon followed in their wake. Per square inch, Connecticut's hills and coastal enclaves probably produced the lion's share of Tonalist imagery. Like other forms of commerce, New York sucked in the seasonal artistic production of its nearby hinterland to be repackaged in winter studios, and then shipped out the finished product through an expanding network of dealers who sold to other dealers and clients throughout the country. With growing efficiency, the Tonalist movement spread across America as local artists absorbed its cosmopolitan sophistication and flair, and its iconic renderings of New England, through exhibitions, art periodicals, and cultural reviews, all of which flowed from New York. William Gilder's *Century Magazine* spearheaded the American renaissance that transformed the nation into a culture maker, and no longer just a consumer of Old World product. New York had become the Paris of America, its art capital and art manufacturing center.

Joseph Pennell had noted that America was wide open for interpretation in art, and with that openness came a proliferation of institutions across the country catering to a nation's new hunger for art. Everywhere, as de Kay had noted in 1901, the art craze was bubbling up. "It is difficult to realize how strong a hold the interest in art is taking outside New York, how many art museums are built and are projected, how large is the number of people who are looking to art for enjoyment or livelihood. Bequests for public establishments to instruct the people in art are beginning to rival those for hospitals, colleges, and schools of science. Wherever a few amateurs and artists get together an art league, society, or club is formed: presently there is an art school, and in course of time comes the foundation of an art gallery or museum."[109]

The 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo and the Saint Louis World's Fair of 1904 added to the momentum, abetted by better economic times and skyrocketing auction prices for American pictures in the Clarke and Evans sales at the opening of the new century, a blue-chip status further confirmed in the public mind by the American triumph at the Comparative Exposition of 1904. With the new museums, came more exhibitions and prize-giving—beloved by the press, which might or might not approve the aesthetics on view but knew the value of medals. By the turn of the century, the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh was up and running with its annual exhibitions. In Philadelphia the venerable Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts annuals attracted New York artists in droves, as well as local artists, as did the Arts Club of Philadelphia. The Boston Art Club provided yet another exhibition venue and annual prizes. The Chicago Art Institute became a regular stop on the art competition circuit. By 1915, it was San Francisco's turn to provide a last hurrah for the aging Tonalists with the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. All of these venues, not to mention the international exhibitions, were showcases for Tonalist art, constantly adding to the imprimatur of success for scores of major artists, while spreading, far and wide, the gospel of low-toned, poetic landscape imagery.

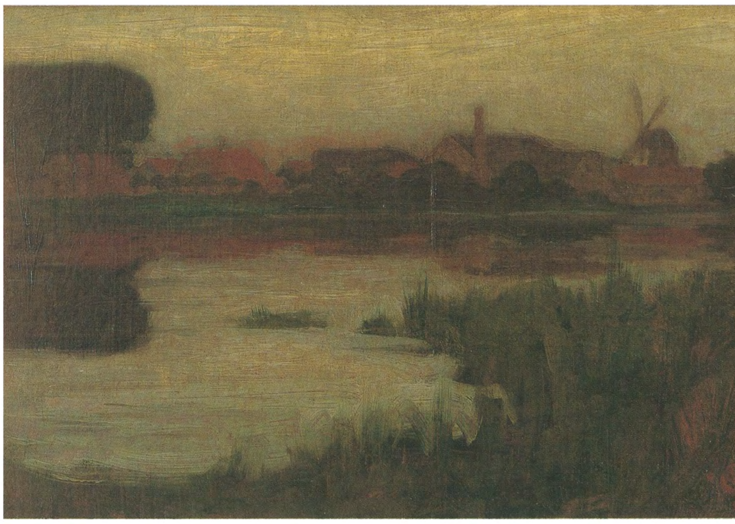


Fig. 8.54. Hermann Dudley Murphy, *Dutch Nocturne*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 13 x 19 in. Private collection.

By the turn of the century, Boston had lost the cultural drive that had made it an innovator in the days of Hunt and La Farge when they had first started out in nearby Newport. Boston remained a strong buyer for Tonalism, but with the exception of the extraordinary artist, teacher, and designer Arthur Wesley Dow, and the artist and frame designer Hermann Dudley Murphy (*Dutch Nocturne*, c. 1900, fig. 8.54), Boston could boast of few forward-looking talents. The literary and artistic exodus to New York had left Boston with little leading-edge energy. Only in the academic sector, which continued to thrive in Cambridge and elsewhere, did the New England mind make outsized contributions. What the historian Van Wyck Brooks has described as the New England Indian summer lingered well into the new century, cannibalizing its brilliant literary and artistic past while providing, for writers and artists alike, the nostalgic setting and Virgilian imagery of a golden age. This, too, was quietly packaged into the Tonalist landscape and sold to the nation. The New England mind might have withdrawn into itself were its spirit not alive in every classroom, reading room, library, and art studio in the country. For many exiles across the vast country, New England remained a state of mind, a lingering memory of childhood, a stanza of Whittier or Emerson, a prose poem of Thoreau or a short story by Sarah Orne Jewett. It was rehearsed and refreshed in every issue of *The Century Magazine* or conjured by Robert Swain Gifford's bowed cypresses on Naushon Island, the granite-encrusted pastures and scintillating tree lines of Dwight Tryon in South Dartmouth, and the pine-scented retreats of Thomas Dewing and Abbott Thayer in New Hampshire and elsewhere, not to mention Maine's rocky sea-blown coastline, the inspiration for Homer's late masterpieces that later attracted artists like George Bellows, Robert Henri, Rockwell Kent, and others.

If New England as a whole provided the most enduring imagery in the Tonalist canon, the coastal enclaves and hilly interiors of Connecticut constituted the urtext. For the Tonalist painter, who gravitated to the gristle and bone of landscape, Connecticut, littered with granite outcroppings, tumbled walls, and defunct farms, was a cornucopia of nostalgia and inspiration. Its interior hill lands and pastures attracted the likes of Ben Foster, Charles Warren Eaton, J. Alden Weir, James Moser, and Alexander Van Laer. Coastal Greenwich and Cos Cob on the Mianus River were home to both John Twachtman and Leonard Ochtman, who translated the pastures and ponds and snow-clad hills of their rural neighborhood into subjects of refined beauty. Old Lyme, Noank, and Mystic, just up the train line to Boston, became the summer haunts of Connecticut Tonalists like Charles Harold Davis, Henry Ward Ranger, and Bruce Crane. Ranger and Crane made the boardinghouse of Florence Griswold in Old Lyme the center of a thriving art colony. This charming, white-columned colonial home set amid sprawling lawns and ancient oaks provided dappled vistas for many Connecticut Tonalists around the turn of the century. Only a few steps from the back door, the saltwater marshes flanking the Lieutenant River served as inspiring subject matter. The nearby overgrown meadows and resplendent oaks corraled by slumping stone walls and split-rail fences soon became iconic images of a disappearing past.

Henry Ward Ranger, 1858–1916

For the Tonalist movement, Henry Ward Ranger (fig. 8.55) has remained a name to conjure with. In the estimation of his contemporaries (though not the critic Charles de Kay) he was not just a great Tonalist painter but, by 1914, was seen as the leader of the "Tonal School." Ranger's considerable reputation, and the considerable prices his work commanded, fell precipitously in the 1930s, however, as was the case for many of his colleagues, and never recovered. Even today it is hard to give him his due. Among the important Tonalists, he was probably the most conservative in approach, deriving much of his look and style, certainly in his early work, from contemporary Dutch painting as well as from the Barbizon School and the Venetian Renaissance—a pedigree he proudly touted as the heritage of the American Tonalists. This was a double-edged sword and his early reliance on classic European models and mannerisms, and vigorous painterly effects was both a strength and a weakness. At his best, synthesizing his many influences into a heartfelt personal take on his revered American landscape, he could produce masterful works in oil as well as smaller sketches.

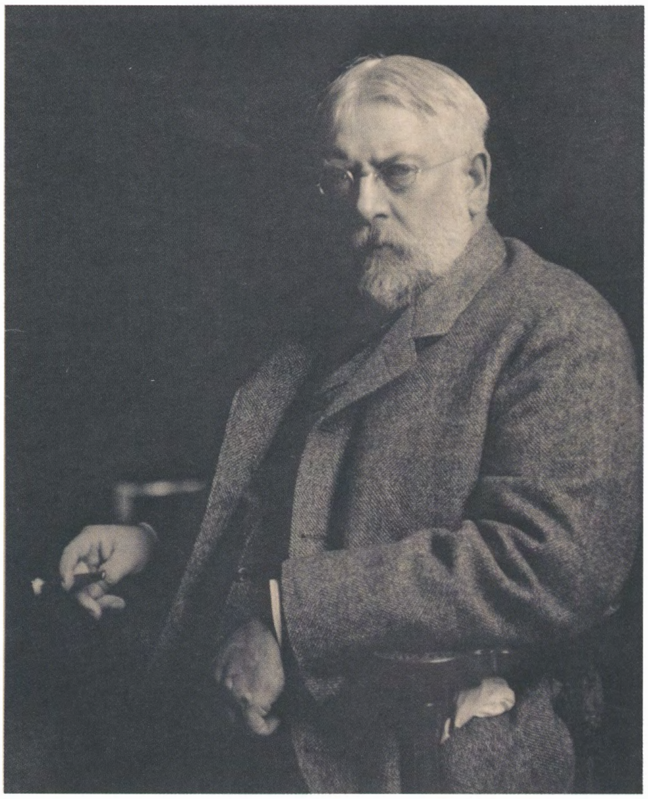


Fig. 8.55. Photograph, Henry Ward Ranger, c. 1910, Courtesy Miscellaneous Photography Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Growing up in Syracuse, New York, the son of a professor of photography, Ranger took to art early on, was largely self-taught, and spent much of his early career painting in Europe, especially in low-lying Holland, where he specialized in watercolor. He was attracted by the naturalism and low gray tonalities of contemporary Dutch landscape painters, especially The Hague School of Anton Mauve, who became a friend of Ranger's. The true source of his style was French Barbizon painting and its focus on the bucolic ideal. Coming late to the New York art world in the 1890s— he spent a number of summers in Canada painting—Ranger missed Whistler's aesthetic revolution in New York of the 1880s. By the end of the 1890s, he was drawn to Connecticut's abandoned homesteads and magnificent stands of oak, which became the raw stuff of his signature style. In the depression market of the 1890s, his European landscapes in a traditional mode appealed to wealthy buyers, including William T. Evans and his orbit of collectors in the Lotos Club, whose exhibitions Ranger would continue to influence. At one time or another, Evans owned twenty-nine works by Ranger. Although he exhibited landscapes at the Society of American Artists from 1890 on, Ranger was not elected a member, unsurprising given his tendency to adhere to Barbizon style, which was frowned on by society insiders, for whom Whistler's Aesthetic Tonalism had provided the imprimatur of success for more than a decade. Possibly, too, Ranger's perceived lack of academic finesse, or at least an Art Students League pedigree, made society members less than enthusiastic about the artist's work.

Charles de Kay certainly let Ranger know, if in somewhat ambiguous terms, where his future lay in terms of entrée into the highest circles of critical acclaim, noting in an 1899 review of Ranger's landscapes at the Tooth Gallery, "While his landscapes strike no new note, they are still virile, rich in color, and filled with largeness and breadth, which suggest possibilities Mr. Ranger may yet attain. He has not, however, emancipated himself from the direct influence of the men of 1830, and, after all, if he continues to paint as well under their influence as he now does, it may be better that he should not so emancipate himself, lest he fall by the way."[110] *Trees along the River*, 1899 (fig. 8.56), displays all the lyrical versatility, freedom, and warm charm of Ranger's 1890s Barbizon-infused style. The gauzy, trembling scrim of trees immediately evokes Corot. A tiny, vestigial cow and scudding rower add to the sunny disposition of place and time. The image is certainly picturesque, but Ranger's trees writhe with a wonderful fictile elasticity and his clouds are full of brassy movement and painterly pizzazz. Every brushstroke is alive to the dappled texture of light and color—variations on olive green—that floods the scene. It is easy to understand how even de Kay, who intensely disliked American artists kowtowing to foreign influence, might still be seduced by Ranger's lyricism.

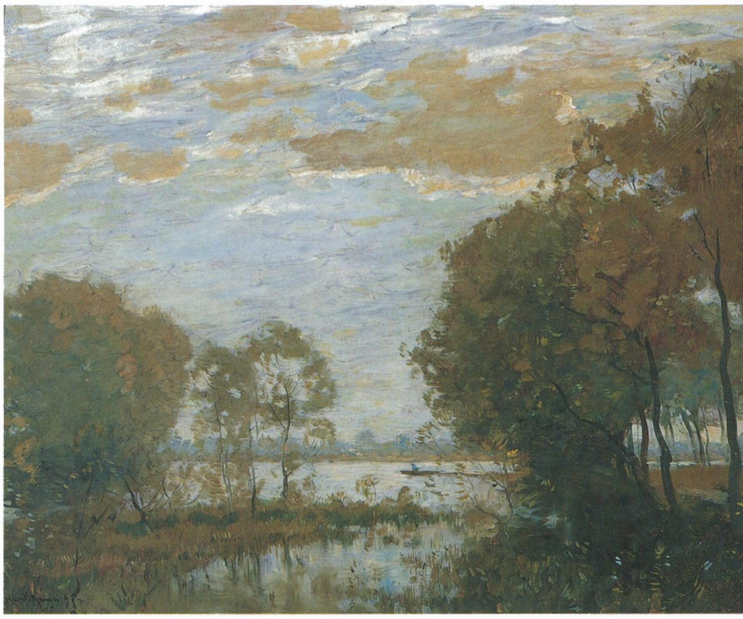


Fig. 8.56. Henry Ward Ranger, *Trees along the River*, 1899. Oil on board, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

Between 1899 and 1903, Ranger became a guiding light to landscape painters in Old Lyme, Connecticut, which was referred to by some as the American Barbizon. So pronounced was this allegiance to Barbizon style among Old Lyme painters in the first years of the new century that the artists' colony soon developed a widespread reputation for genteel art doings: parts of bucolic Old Lyme began to look like bits of woodsy Fontainebleau, without the laboring peasants. The negative association of Tonalism with Barbizon paintings that lingered throughout most of the twentieth century may well have its origins in these years when Ranger was the animating personality at the Florence Griswold house. He was a larger-than-life personality, a fine musician on piano and organ, and knew how to enjoy his life and his art—along with a fine cigar. He was good copy for the press and art journals. When Ranger left Old Lyme in 1903, and a group of Impressionists led by Childe Hassam became the dominant influence in the colony, another notion took hold: that the retrograde Tonalists, beholden to the men of 1830, were replaced by the more progressive Impressionists, habitués in Old Lyme after 1903. This also became the accepted wisdom of subsequent American art history. With the exception of Ranger and Bruce Crane, most of the artists working in the Barbizon mode, such as Lewis Cohen, Carleton Wiggins, and Louis Paul Dessar, were neither major artists nor progressive innovators; their allegiance to the Barbizon mode was an albatross, certainly for their posthumous reputations. At this time, in Society of American Art circles, and even at the National Academy of Design, not to mention the younger painters at the Art Students League, Barbizon-style painting would have been considered anathema, as out of date in 1900 as Impressionism was in Paris at the time. While Ranger at his peak could take aspects of the Barbizon style—its lyricism and rugged paint handling—and translate it into works of individualized greatness, lesser artists failed more often than not: they adhered to Barbizon's textbook tropes rather than its inner dynamic. If anything, the Impressionists who followed on the heels of Ranger at Old Lyme were even more out of date.

The Woodland Scene, circa 1905 (fig. 8.57), is a sumptuous example of Ranger's impassioned embrace of wood interiors, especially gargantuan oaks, which served as inspiration for

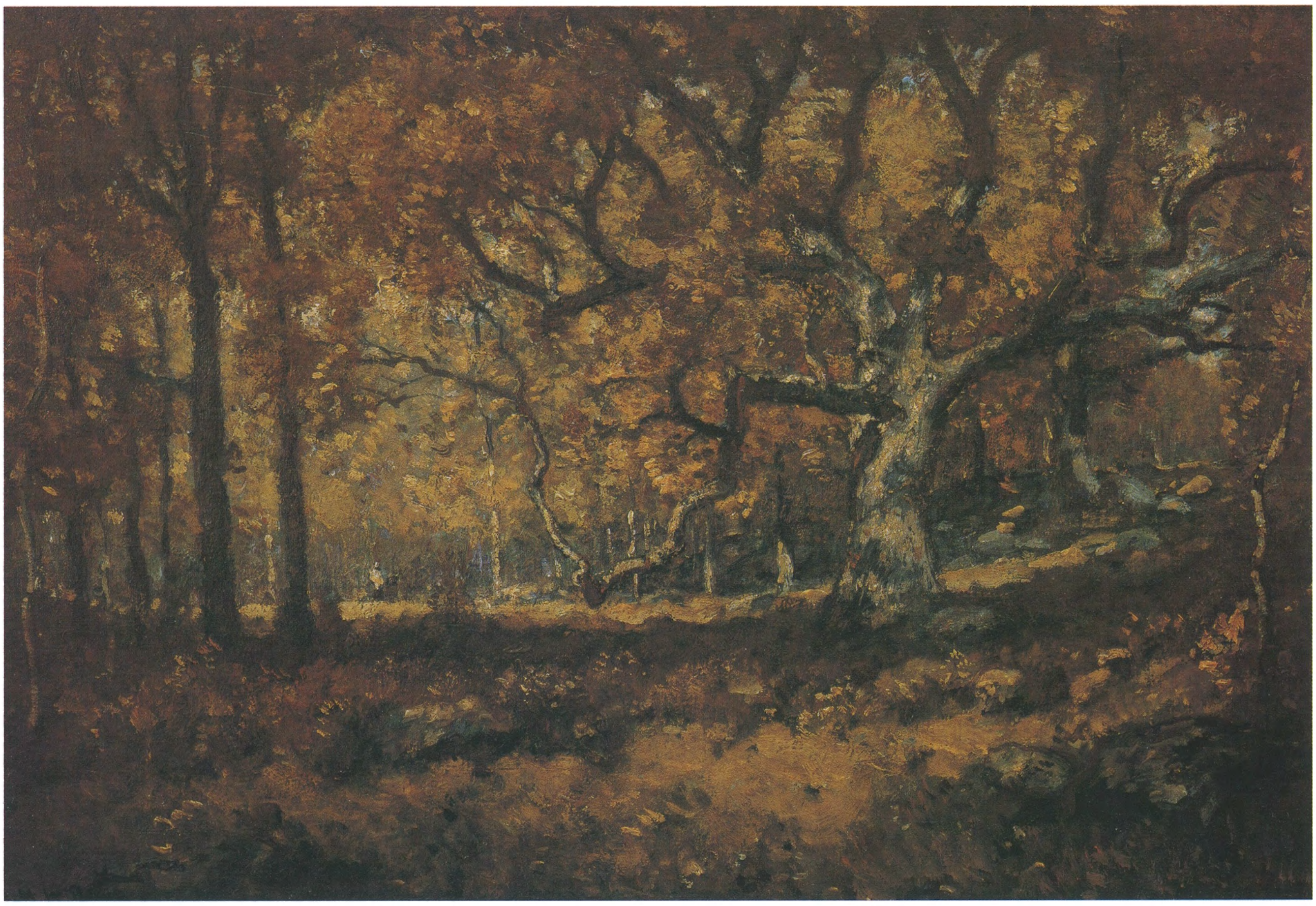


Fig. 8.57. Henry Ward Ranger, *The Woodland Scene*, c. 1905. Oil on panel, 18 x 26 in. Private collection.

some of his finest paintings. Although there are Barbizon elements in the old-master golden tonality and somewhat stylized branch forms, the artist's interpretation is quite original and imbued both with wonder and spiritual uplift. Ranger has adopted such a low perspective that the giant oak looms and dominates the entire canvas; its muscular branches reach out like an ancient forest deity. The tight horizontal format enhances the oak's presence as a distinct forest personage; its gesticulating armature is so all encompassing and complex that its branches, moving in and out of rich chiaroscuro shadow, threaten to break the surface plane with their animating energy. In Ranger's day, such imagery would have immediately conjured thoughts of Greek and Roman mythology for the classically minded, directing the imagination back to a time when when the oak was worshipped as a symbol of strength and hospitality, when boughs of oaks were carried in marriage ceremonies as symbols of fecundity, when ancient forests were peopled with virgin wood nymphs, the Hamadryads of Greek poetry, whose very souls were merged with an oak to which they were bonded. Thoreau marveled at old stands of first-growth oaks, second only to the white pine, predicting they would become pilgrimage sites for later generations, so rare a sight were they in his day. Ranger, too, marveled, an emotion visible in the molten forces bubbling up from his surfaces in thick impastos, luscious and rich with jewel-like tone, a painterly approximation of the underlying powers constantly transforming the natural world.

The Woodland Scene is vitalized by the artist's supple brushwork and inspired tonal modulations, which include startling passages of blue, violet, and crimson amid the browns and ochers, only adding to the peculiar metamorphic, or possibly, anthropomorphic life of the venerable oak—a survivor of America's own mythic wilderness past. Ranger's paint surfaces have a mosaiclike quality; they glitter darkly, a nod to the subtle glazing the artist admired in Venetian painting. Though some aspects of his surface are derived from Diaz and Rousseau, or even Dutch sources, Ranger's is a personal expression, a mystical, even visionary creation, and very much of his time. By 1905, the painter and critic Arthur Hoeber recognized Ranger's larger-than-life landscape style, or as the critic described it, "the larger and more forceful aspect" of his landscapes. "I know of no artist whose pictures are so thoroughly representative of the man himself as are those of Mr. Ranger, whose powerful physical personality and rugged strength are reflected in his own canvases. Yet behind this unusual virility and tireless energy there is a gentle strain of poetry and tenderness, which manifests itself not only in the refinement and delicacy of the sentiment in the interpretation of the theme, but, away from his easel, takes its outlet through the medium of the man's expression in music. . . . Painting with the most generous use of pigment, scraping, repainting, glazing, scumbling, or again floating on color into rich undertones with varnish, Mr. Ranger attains his ends somehow, and a depth of tone is secured that is highly effective, while always his composition interest is sustained to the last degree."[111] Hoeber also noted a rebellious streak in Ranger, who made little effort to be included in public exhibitions or chase after medals. Independent, virile, and sensitive, Ranger by 1914 had become the poster-boy for the Tonalist movement, certainly in its more individualistic if conservative mode.

Ranger left Old Lyme in 1903 for the more remote Connecticut fishing town of Noank up the coast near Mystic; he wanted to get away from the hordes of amateur painters following in his footsteps to Old Lyme, and he may have found it discomfiting to be too closely identified with the American Barbizon in New York's elite art circles. Noank provided him the space and inspiration to fully develop his personal style. Nearby, on Mason's Island, more old-growth oaks served as inspiration in the coming decade. That Ranger might be too closely identified with retardataire Barbizon painting remained a nagging issue for Charles de Kay in a 1903 review of an exhibition at the Tooth Galleries, as did Ranger's inconsistencies: "It is hard to find the real Ranger in these eleven canvases . . . many . . . have a rather baffling superficiality. . . . Sometimes one questions whether Mr. Ranger himself knows exactly what he wants. He has tried many keys, and still it seems that he is not entirely sure which one suits him best. Doubtless he will find it some day and establish a method, a view of nature, a style of his own. The fact that he is still groping is not the least of the attractions in his pictures, which are many. He is striving hard to be a colorist [Tonalist] just now, and his endeavors are watched with sympathy by every one who feels that he has a good deal in him. Perhaps he is trying to paint too many canvases each year, but probably he knows better than his critics how much is good for him."[112] Although Ranger was a prominent and successful artist (his paintings were selling well, for top prices in many cases), de Kay was signaling that he had still to find himself. In a 1906 review, de Kay finds much that is praiseworthy from the "talented painter" who "is at his best in simple, broad, open pasture view," and says of a view of Noank harbor: "Under the heavy gray clouds one fairly sees these vessels bounce up and down on the short, choppy waves; the painter has expressed stormy, darkening skies, angry water, and vapor-laden air with remarkable skill. . . . More conventional are landscapes with tree masses arranged like pictures for bygone landscapists . . . ."[113]

Although Ranger's work of coastal and harbor scenes displays strength and feeling, it is his most private moments among fields, when he painted with a sketch-like spontaneity, that seem to have brought out his best. *Crumbled Fences*, circa 1905 (fig. 8.58), highlights Ranger's superb paint-handling skills—expressive, vigorous, and yet nuanced in his ability to capture transitory lighting effects. Here among the tumbled stone walls and split-rail fences of an abandoned pasture, encroached on by second-growth oaks, the artist's deepest reveries seem fully invested. In this small oil sketch, Ranger plumbs the poetry of autumn and the missing inhabitants of a vanished agricultural world—much as Thoreau had when he contemplated cellar holes on the outskirts of Walden Pond—displaying what de Kay described in Ranger's work as an "intimacy of touch and a pervading beauty," and "the artist's talent for arranging a pictorial effect with the more or less stubborn materials of nature."[114] By 1909, even de Kay, in a review of a Macbeth Gallery exhibition, was finally prepared to give the artist his blessing on terms that both artist and critic had conceded. "For the most part Mr. Ranger's work makes a forcible and prompt impression; he feels the strength rather than the delicacy of nature and attacks his subjects with an almost uniform vigor. He handles his thick paint with an amazing dexterity, and his color schemes, already rich, are of a kind to ripen with age into a still more mellow and pleasure-giving harmony."[115]

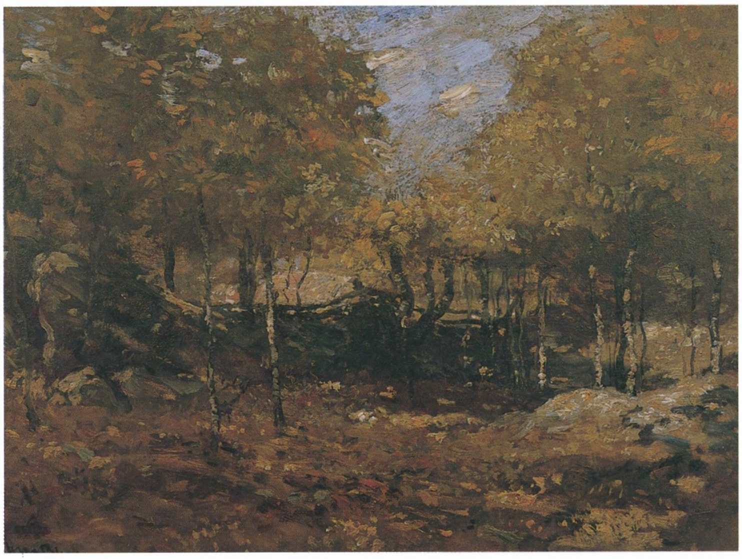


Fig. 8.58. Henry Ward Ranger, *Crumbled Fences*, c. 1905. Oil on board, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

Having spent much of the 1880s abroad, and with relatively little contact with the New York art world until the mid-1890s, Ranger had missed much of Whistler's aesthetic revolution in matters of formal composition, decorative patterning, and Asian design concepts, as well as the low-toned etherealities and suggestiveness that marked so much of progressive American painting in those decades. As a result, Ranger's brand of Tonalism, and that of his better followers and admirers, was overly determined by the Barbizon methodology and ethos, and thus hampered by a retrograde raison d'être in terms of evolving either a personal or progressive style along the lines of Expressive Tonalism. After 1900, the best American painting had turned to Symbolist themes. Ranger seems to have been only too aware of his shortcomings, and struggled mightily to find his way to a signature style of rugged naturalism. When he faltered, it was often because he was striving after decorative effects beyond his technical wherewithal. For Whistler and the best Tonalists, the decorative quality came out of the process rather than being layered on top of it: design and emotion were one and the same. Many of Ranger's followers, who embraced the substance and spirit of Barbizon's retardataire Old World charms, simply atrophied as artists, producing innocuous works of little lasting value. They suffered a fate similar to that of their Impressionist colleagues, or American expatriates who remained abroad painting in French academic styles for the home market: they filled a market niche but little else. Ranger's grand successes and derivative failures epitomize the struggle of so many American artists to forge both an individual identity and a uniquely American mode.

Ranger died suddenly of cardiac arrest—he was always a heavy smoker and a big eater—in his New York studio in 1916.[116] But he was not forgotten. The following February, in 1917, as America entered the war in France, one of his paintings brought $1,450, second only to a Homer Dodge Martin, which sold for $3,000 and a Wyant for $2,600.[117] A month later his estate was auctioned off, with a total of 129 paintings selling for $66,240, the highest average price ever paid for a deceased artist's works, according to a headline in the *New York Times*. One painting brought $4,100 and two others, $2,500 apiece.[118] Ranger had been an astute businessman. His estate of more than $200,000 was left to the National Academy of Design for the purchase and distribution of paintings by artists over the age of 45 to institutions around the country, a role the Ranger Fund fills to this day. It is noteworthy that in Ranger's personal collection, also put on the auction block, in addition to examples of Inness, Wyant, and Twachtman were a number of works by J. Francis Murphy and more than ten works by William Gedney Bunce, both highly expressive artists who reveled in abstracting from nature, much along the lines that Ranger had followed in his own work. Ranger's fall from grace by the 1930s is attributable to the fact that he was associated, rightly or wrongly, with the most backward-looking Tonalists—the epigoni beholden to the Barbizon picturesque—and to the large body of work he left behind, the indifferent and early work made in Europe, which crowded out his later and more stellar creations.

Bruce Crane, 1857–1937

Another artist who spent time in Old Lyme, where he knew Henry Ward Ranger, was Bruce Crane (fig. 8.59). One of the most talented and prolific Tonalists, painting some of his best work in Old Lyme, Crane could be uneven in his repetition of signature motifs. He had an early affinity for Tonalism, studying with Alexander Wyant in 1877, and remained a friend of the artist until his death in 1892. Although Wyant certainly headed Crane in the direction of intimate, broadly painted interpretations of nature, Whistler, or Whistler channeled through the French artist Jean-Charles Cazin, was a formative and enduring influence on Crane who favored Cazin's limited range of flat muted tonality and deeply embedded decorative compositional strategies. In addition to his apprenticeship with Wyant, Crane studied at the Art Students League during the period 1878–82, where he seamlessly adopted Whistlerian compositional modes, immediately apparent in his landscapes of Long Island painted after 1879. *Meadow near East Hampton*, circa 1880 (fig. 8.60), displays Crane's transition to more lyrical subject matter, embracing the domestic landscapes rather than Wyant's wilder corners of the Catskill and Adirondack mountains. Already, Crane had mastered the subtle patterning of form that leads the eye into the scene along diagonal lines of lush painterly passages of pigment. This was precisely the kind of sophistication that would have appealed to the innovative

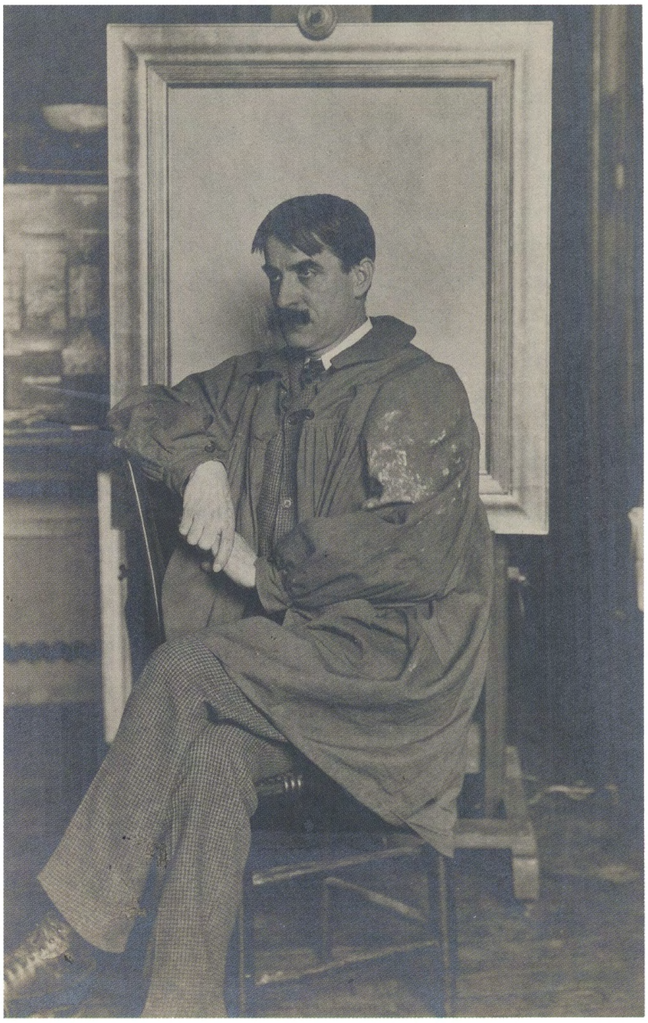


Fig. 8.59. Bruce Crane, photographed c. 1900. Photograph of artist donated by the Worcester Art Museum Collection, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

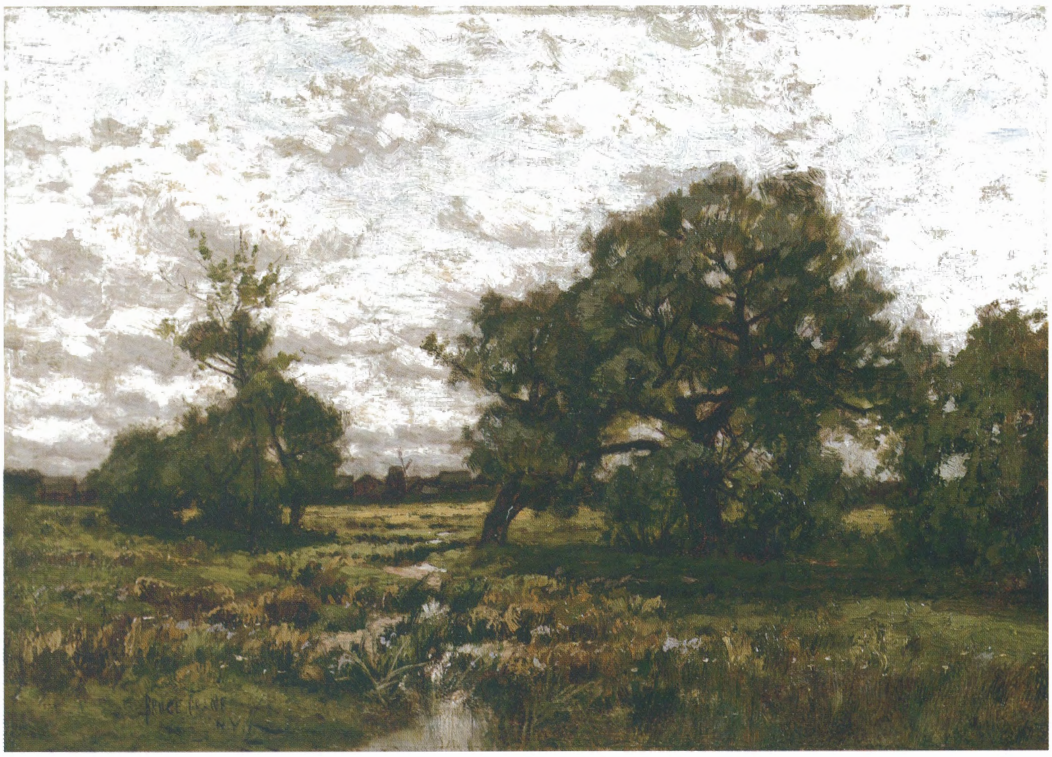


Fig. 8.60. Bruce Crane, *Meadow near East Hampton*, c. 1880. Oil on canvas, 14 x 20 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

founders of the Society of American Artists, especially early landscape stalwarts like Hugh Bolton Jones, William Sartain, and Robert Swain Gifford, and it won Crane membership in 1881, when he was only twenty-four. In 1882, Crane left for his third European trip, spending the summer at Grez-sur-Loing near Barbizon, where he worked alongside American Tonalists Birge and Alexander Harrison, and studied with Jean-Charles Cazin, a French landscapist and genre painter who had come under the influence of Whistler's Nocturnes. Crane noted his enthusiasm for Cazin in a letter to his father: "His method is entirely different from anything you have even seen. Tone is the thing sought for, objects are never modeled, everything is treated as a flat mass. He detests realism & is the best teacher I could have had as I have been inclined to realism."[119]

On his return to New York, Crane put into practice Cazin's modulated tonalities, along with the technical resources of memory painting (another crucial Whistlerian methodology)—working up paintings in the studio either from memory or sketches. Crane became adept at creating a tonal envelope and adjusting the landscape elements to provide a decorative pattern structure. Crane's *Early Spring*, circa 1885 (fig. 8.61), embraces the low-toned modulations of Cazin, the decorative schemes of Whistler, and even the kind of overcast skies of Europe that appealed to so many American expatriates. A *Century Magazine* article of 1885, "The Summer Haunts of American Artists," noted that Easthampton on Long Island attracted artists like Charles Melville Dewey, Hugh Bolton Jones, and Bruce Crane for its resemblance to Brittany and its sense of nostalgia for America's fading past: "Mr. Bruce Crane, too, is carried straight to Pont Aven by the hay-ricks and poultry-yards, and by the soft gray atmosphere. ... Dreary sand-dunes, barn yards, and straw-stacks, vague roads winding indistinctly no one cares whither, weird poplar-trees whose sparse leaves shiver lightly in contrast to the close-set foliage of twisted apple trees,—all tell of the great variety which Easthampton offers to the painter of landscape alone."[120] Crane was very much in the forefront of Tonalists who, like Thoreau before them, set out to portray a vanishing rural world. *Early Spring* does this while also epitomizing Aesthetic Tonalism as it flourished in the exhibitions of the Society of American Artists in the 1880s, a poetic, moody, lyrical style bespeaking a mysterious reserve, in which hard- and soft-edged forms play off one another to create a breathless equilibrium and stillness.

Crane, like fellow members of the Society of American Artists, including Hugh Bolton Jones, William Merritt Chase, and Robert Swain Gifford among others, could paint in large format, but Aesthetic Tonalism was even more conducive to small-sized paintings such as *Early Spring*, which in turn derived their sketch-like freedom from the Tonalist watercolor as it enjoyed its first great boom in these years. Crane's watercolor winterscapes (see *Effect on the Harlem River*, c. 1890s, fig. 5.41)—the artist was an early member of the progressive New York Water Color Club—were particularly well suited to his subtle, modulated colors and exquisite feel for design. *Marsh Sunset*, circa 1890 (fig 8.62), a prime example of Aesthetic Tonalism's move toward mystical reverie in the last decade of

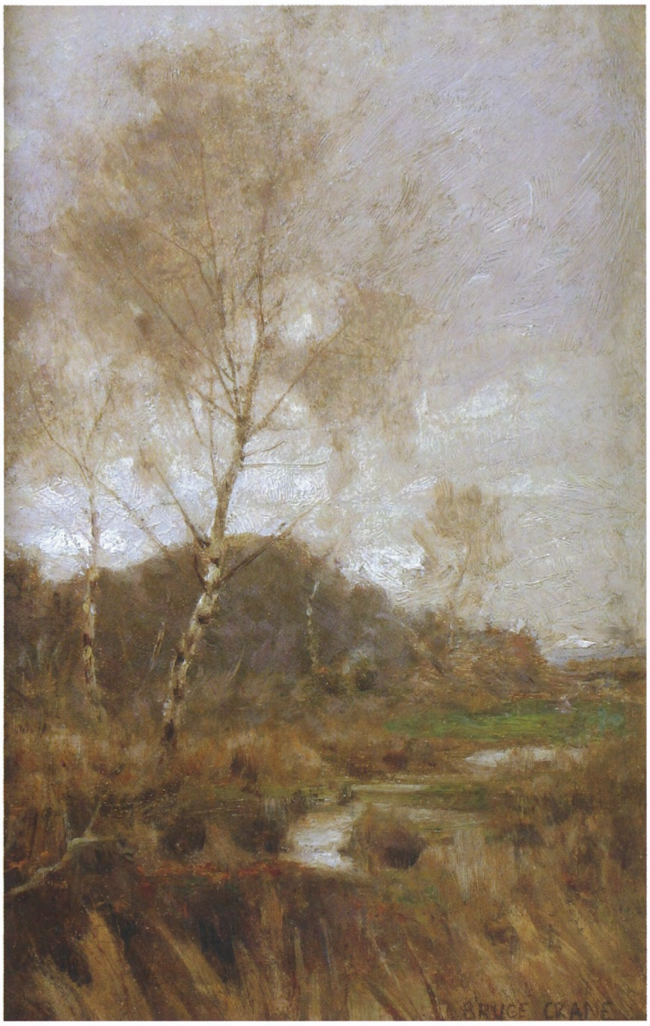


Fig. 8.61. Bruce Crane, *Early Spring*, c. 1885. Oil on board, 12 x 8 in. Private collection, Ann Arbor, MI. Courtesy Hawthorne Fine Art.

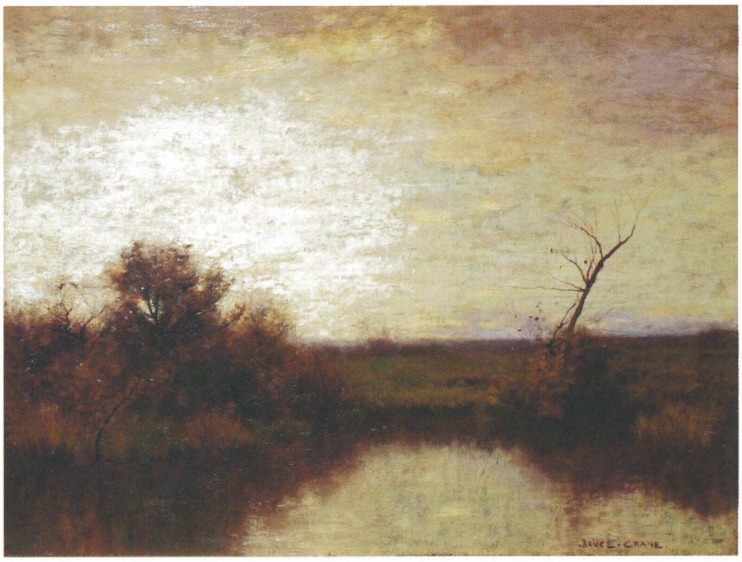


Fig. 8.62. Bruce Crane, *Marsh Sunset*, c. 1890. Oil on canvas, 18 x 24 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

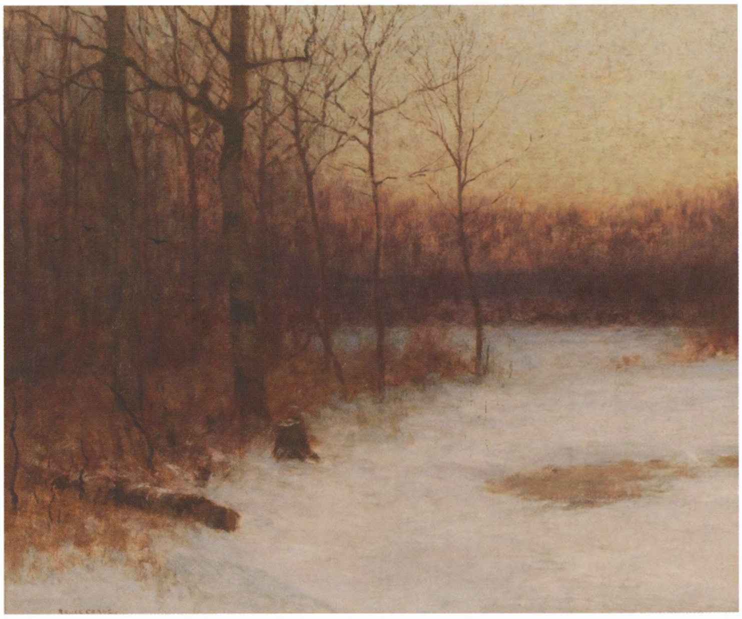


Fig. 8.63. Bruce Crane, *Winter Solitude*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

the nineteenth century, displays Crane's ability to tease out the most evanescent colors under fading light. Crane's diffuse landscape forms appear to literally float between water and sky; infused with tremulous light from below and above, the soft-edged masses are almost as vaporous as the air itself, revealing layer upon layer of opalescent color. The strategic inclusion of a few hard-edged notes in the tree branches provides just enough counterpoint to the rhythmic flow of the landscape forms to give them dynamic structure, while heightening the sense of confluence between the material and spiritual—a mystical, even trance-like expression straight out of Thoreau's notebooks.

Crane's *Winter Solitude*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.63), translates the artist's bewitching feel for ambiguous form to a bleak, snow-clad landscape. The lyrical choreography of a stripped-down nature is dramatized against an austere winter backdrop, providing yet another captivating if hidden narrative: the formal beauty of pattern and form in the intersecting verticals and horizontals. When Crane won the prestigious Webb Prize for landscape at the Society of American Artists in 1897, James Townsend in the *New York Times* noted a stylistic change from his early attraction to Aesthetic Tonalism. "Mr. Crane's landscape is rather a new subject for him, as he chiefly delights to paint snowy fields under slaty skies, but it has all his sentiment and sympathy with nature, is charmingly simple in composition, and has a most delicate and truthful color scheme."[121] This simplicity, refinement, and growing emphasis on subtle tonality would become increasingly apparent in Crane's work from 1900 onward, following a trend toward larger formats that characterized Expressive Tonalism in these decades. *Golden Hour*, circa 1905 (fig. 8.64), exemplifies the artist's mastery of spare formats and striking schematic forms and modulated tones to create a spellbinding moment of wonder. Using only the barest touches of detail, Crane has

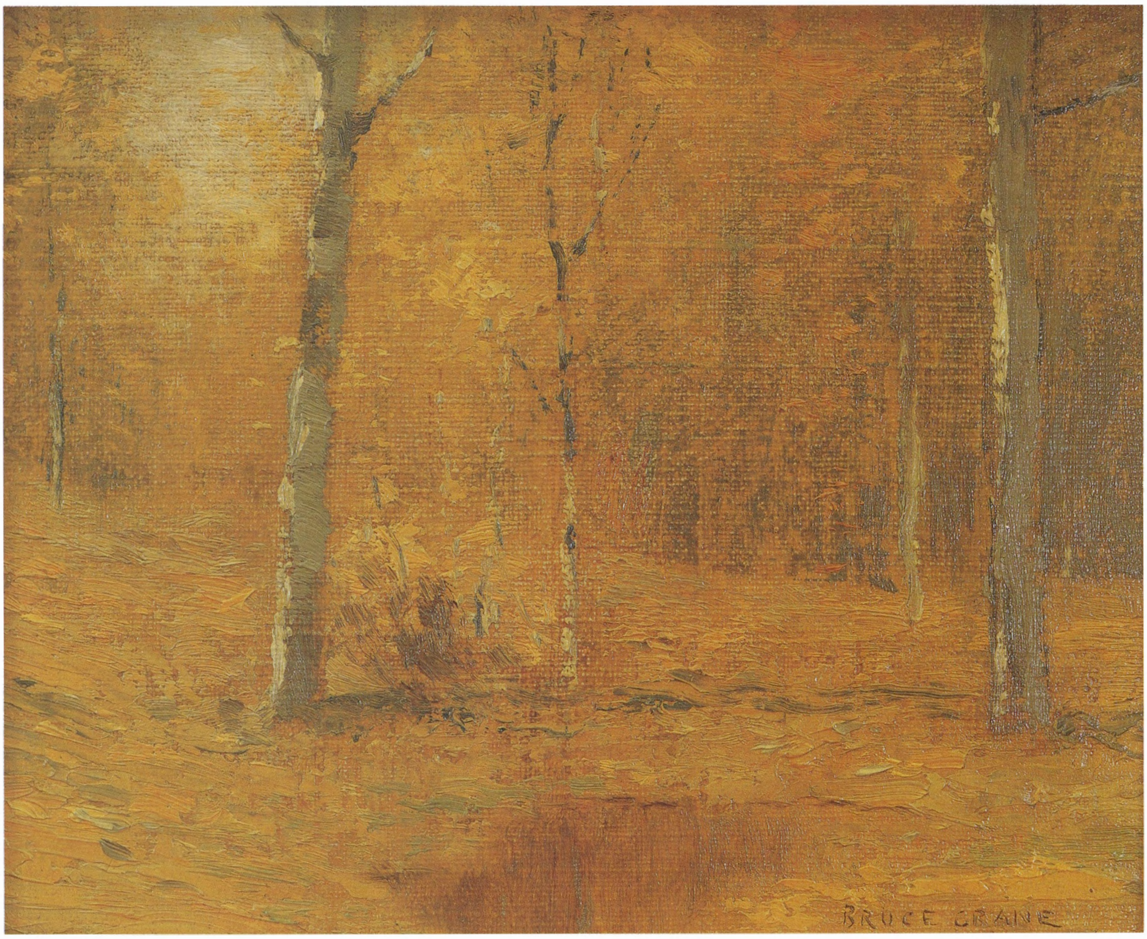


Fig. 8.64. Bruce Crane, *Golden Hour*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 8 x 10 in. Private collection.

brought a woodland world to glowing life in a painting that was included in the Salmagundi Club Annual Thumb Box Exhibition. It is both exquisitely real and perfectly designed as a decorative gem: less a recording of nature and more an insight into the imagination—the thing Crane revered above all else. The artist had written a few years earlier: "To me the highest work is the subjective or imaginary. Inness, Corot, and Millet were of this school. No more careful students of nature ever lived; they knew their grammars perfectly, but all their interpretations were colored with the exquisite poetry and feeling of these wonderful imaginations."[122]

A scandalous divorce and Crane's remarriage to his step-daughter who was twenty-four years younger, caused enormous upheaval in the artist's life around the turn of the century, but soon he was painting better than ever. He spent more time in the Adirondacks scouting material and found himself drawn more and more to the human landscape. "There was a time when no mountain was high enough for me, no valley deep enough, and no outlook broad enough.... I have come ... to like simpler subjects better.... What I like in landscape is the touch of man.... I used to be in the Adirondacks woods with Wyant, but now I go to the more cleared, the tilled, parts."[123] Crane most likely found comfort and support among his like-minded peers when he joined the Society of Landscape Painters for its first exhibition in 1898, a group that staked its claim to an indigenous Tonalist landscape style. His work in a 1900 Society of Landscape Painters exhibition brought kind words from Charles de Kay: "Of Bruce Crane it may be said that he goes from strength to strength. His 'Peace at Night,' a Cazin subject, is beautifully composed and charmingly painted, and there is his accustomed sentiment and delicate lovely color in his other works." De Kay also appreciated Crane's growing versatility, though not enough to resist quibbling, as was his tendency, when Crane won the Inness Prize at the National Academy of Design's annual exhibition in 1901. De Kay characterizes Crane as a "painter of snowy reaches in Connecticut, of crocus-colored sunsets, and bare fields of stubble, glorified by the afterglow." And then opines: "Mr. Crane's 'Golden Grain' and 'the Year's Wane' belong to the good, but not to the pre-eminently good, landscapes here. The pastel effects in 'The Year's Wane' are pleasing but not strong." After enumerating a dozen other more deserving prizewinners, de Kay concedes: "Suffice it that Mr. Crane's work here and in former exhibitions has been worthy of some particular distinction."[124]

Another one of Crane's many distinctions came in 1909 when he won the Carnegie Prize for *November Hills*, 1909

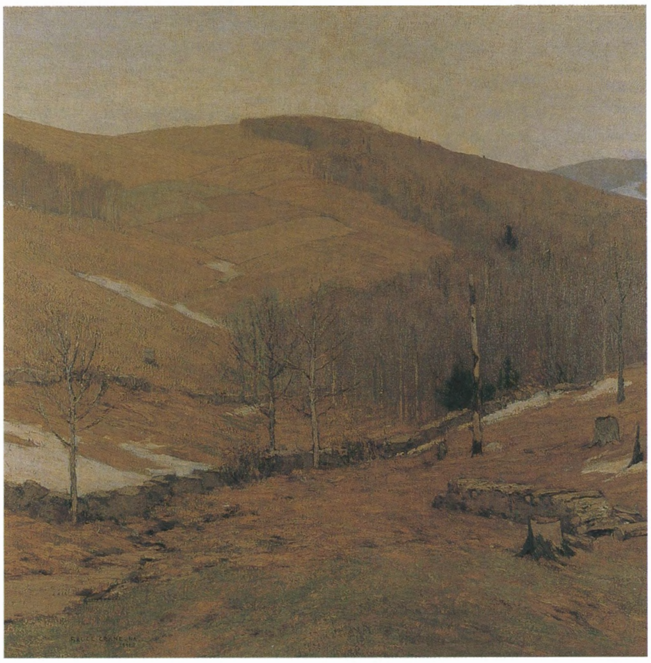


Fig. 8.65. Bruce Crane, *Awakening Hills*, 1911. Oil on canvas, 45½ x 46 in. Courtesy Garzoli Gallery.

(Carnegie Museum of Art). A similar painting, *Awakening Hills*, 1911 (fig. 8.65), demonstrates Crane's development of a broader decorative style, combining realism and a sense of time, place, and mood with a fundamentally conceptualist strategy that emphasizes shapes, patterns, and delicate paint work—all within a harmonized color field. A 1908 review by de Kay of a work by Crane in a two-man exhibition at the Katz Gallery demonstrates how much the critic admired and championed such conceptualist strategies. "The composition is exceedingly simple in its elements, a line of hillside, accented by sparse trees with bare branches; a line of houses, bald in their geometrical construction, innocent of external ornament, their clapboards painted with browns and reds and whites that have softened under the harsh treatment of New England Winters, and a line of gray rail fence, the grave harmony relieved by the cool, greenish blue of the sky and by the patches of quiet green on the hill and in the foreground, and of piet [*sic*] red in the bushes, echoing and emphasizing the red of the house on the right. Nothing could be more reserved or less idealized, yet the prim, sweet beauty of the New England landscape and the human interests that so often are in closest harmony with it are

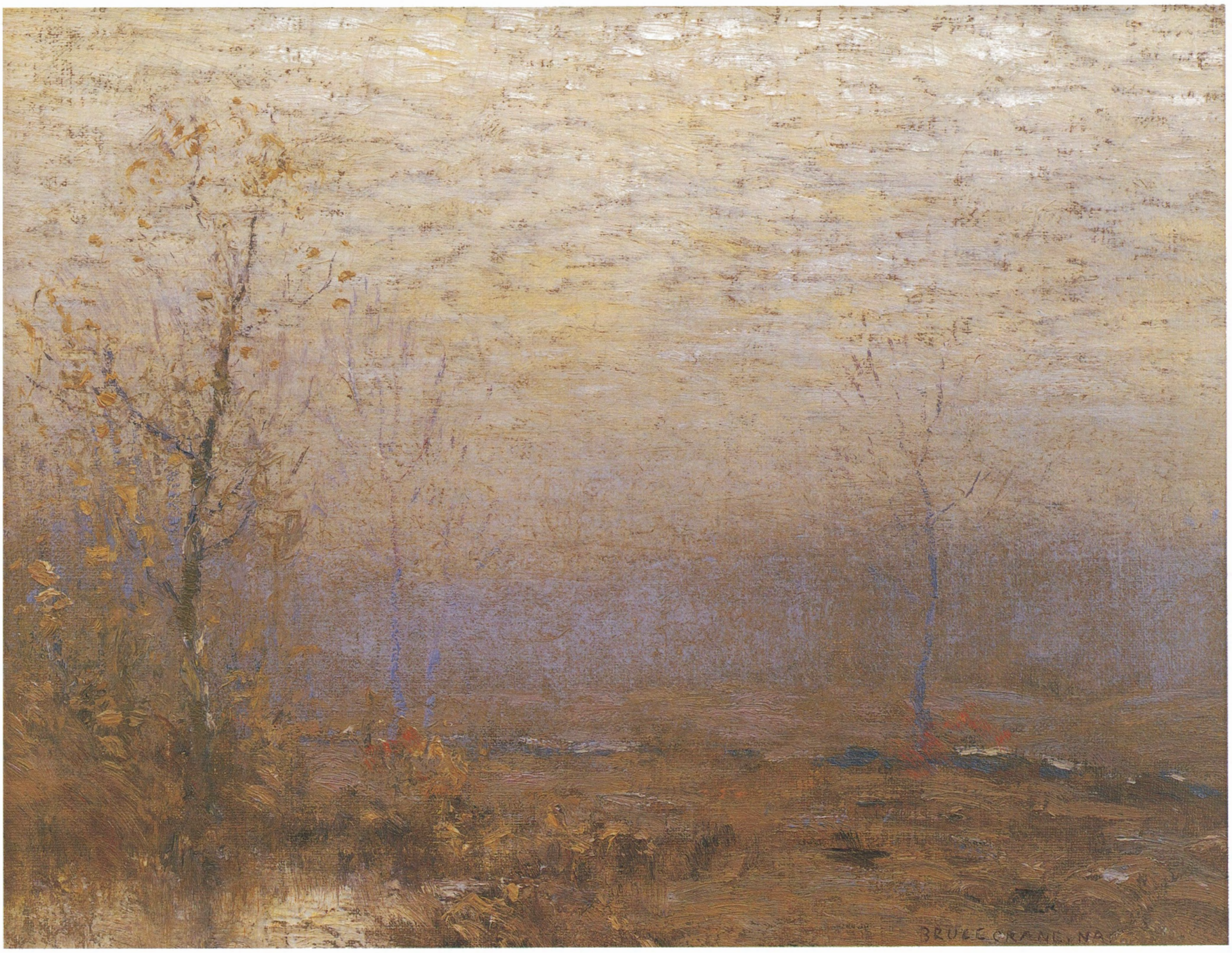


Fig. 8.66. Bruce Crane, *Silvery Grey Morning*, c. 1915. Oil on canvas, 10 x 13 in. Private collection.

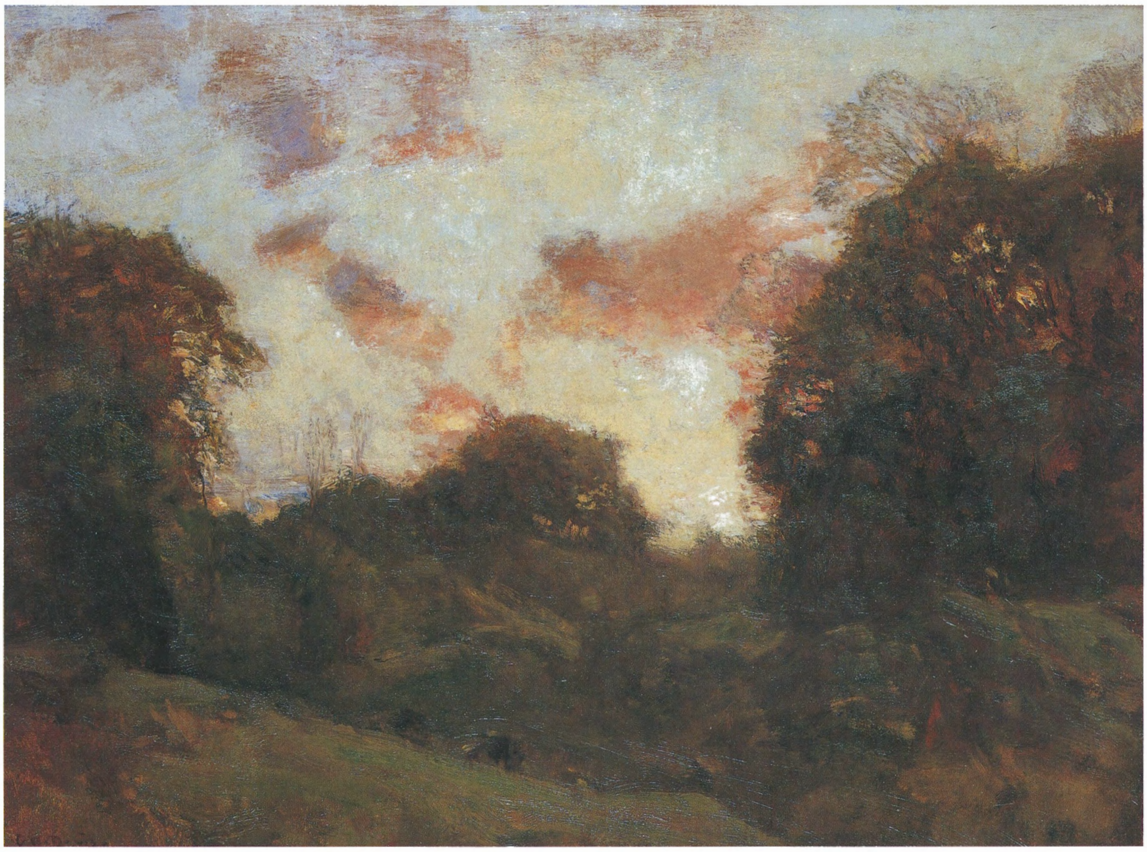


Fig. 8.67. Charles Harold Davis, *Sunset over Mystic*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 20 x 27 in. Private collection.

rendered with unmistakable truth."[125] Crane, like Ben Foster, Emil Carlsen, and other Tonalists after 1900, used a square format in *Awakening Hills*, further reinforcing the decorative aspects of the design by impeding a recessional read and thus making more of a display of the pattern armature, the delicate patchwork of harmonious tones, and surface paint handling.

Crane continued to evolve his style into the first two decades of the twentieth century—winning a slew of major prizes—and became increasingly associated with Old Lyme, following in Henry Ward Ranger's footsteps to become a regular at the Florence Griswold house, though his aestheticizing of the old pastures around Old Lyme was far removed from the vigorous paint work Ranger had employed. *Silvery Grey Morning*, circa 1915 (fig. 8.66), is emblematic of the shimmering, mist-filled pastures Crane was drawn to during this period. Here, his penchant for simplification produces rarefied ethereal effects in which the concrete facts of nature are turned into wisps and specters—a dematerialization that, against all logic, seems to reveal the pulsing, glistening energies beneath the surface of things. Crane, right through the 1930s, was also capable of great vigor and fire in his paint handling, creating astonishing effects in his wintry mountain vistas, many in Expressionist renderings of exuberant passion and beauty.

Artists of Connecticut: Charles Harold Davis, Charles Warren Eaton, J. Alden Weir, Albert Pinkham Ryder, William Lathrop, Alexander Van Laer, Ben Foster, Hugh Bolton Jones, James Moser

Because of proximity by train to New York, the interior and coastal towns of Connecticut became favorite haunts of Tonalist painters. As early as 1885, the depiction of such rural abodes had become a market necessity for professional artists: "The demand made by the public and the critics that the work of American artists should be American in subject at least, is largely conceded; and the varied scenes of our mountains and coasts... are everywhere studied with avidity. One can now scarcely make a summer excursion in any picturesque locality without encountering the white umbrellas and light portable easels of the nomad artist."[126]

Charles Harold Davis, after his early and enormously successful years painting in France, settled in Mystic, Connecticut, in 1892 and transformed the hills and clouds and seascapes in his vicinity into soaring tonal abstractions. *Sunset over Mystic*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.67), displays the artist's middle-period style of paint handling inspired by the rugged hills and expansive skies of his new home. Davis's sumptuous tonal brushwork billows forth with roiling yet understated energy, creating a kind of roller-coaster ride of expressive form and activated facture. His seething pinks and magentas seem to absorb the rising thermals of day's end: a vibrant brew of metamorphic energy—at once impasto, clouds, and an early foray into what would later be termed Color Field painting. Hills, trees, and clouds create a near-hypnotic vortex of invisible forces that gives *Sunset over Mystic* a feeling of otherworldly rapture. Gone is the meticulous laying in of tonal planes of the early French work, replaced here by expressive facture that revels in light and shade, akin to late Monet. Davis spoke of his need to live away from New York and his fascination with seasonal light in Mystic: "It has been a quiet but delightful grind at Mystic, Conn., away from all disturbing of business and controversy. I carefully mature the pictures in hand and make daily observations of the changing effects of this season [early spring], to me perhaps the most subtle and beautiful of them all."[127] *Wind Driven*, circa 1921 (fig. 8.68), is another tour de force of Davis's late Expressive Tonalism, and an exemplar of the way in which the Tonalist aesthetic after 1900 stimulated powerfully new creative drives in its most accomplished proponents. Davis was equally adept at painting in a low-toned mode, especially for Lotos Club exhibitions presided over by William Evans, or in a brighter expressionistic or Impressionist mode that accommodated his fascination with expansive skies. From 1910 on, Davis became famous for his cloud paintings; it is hard to think of any artist, including Constable, who was more intoxicated with billowing cloud formations and the infinite abstractions to be found there.

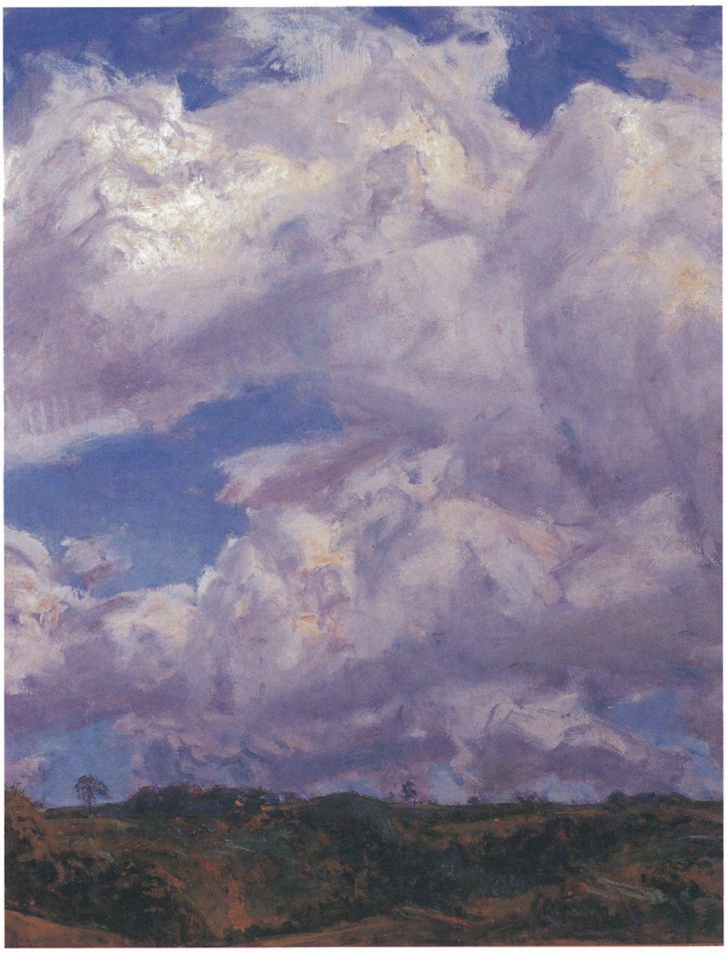


Fig. 8.68. Charles Harold Davis, *Wind Driven*, c. 1921. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in. Courtesy Garzoli Gallery.

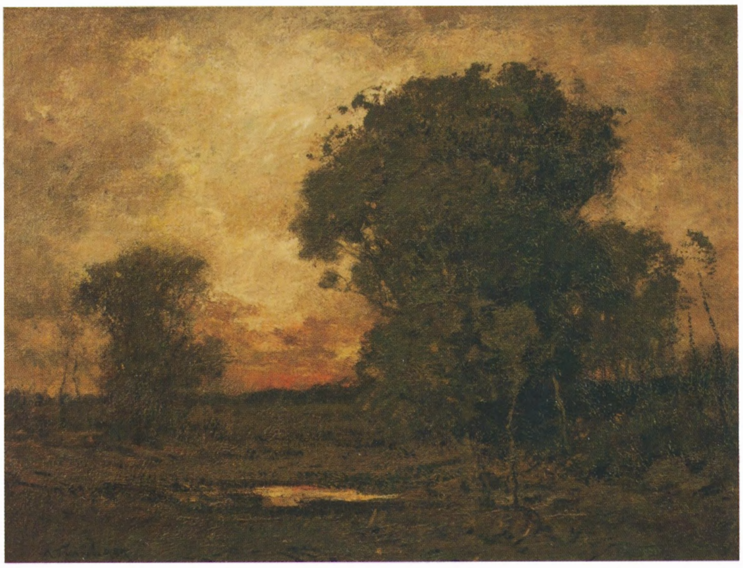


Fig. 8.69. Alexander Van Laer, *Sunset Trees*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 20 x 26 in. Private collection.

At one time or another, almost every artist noted so far was drawn to the Connecticut hills, which Gilder's *Century Magazine* had signaled out for their aesthetic allure: "The environing hills form lines and masses of rare beauty seen from whatever direction, and from their summits one gains a far-reaching panorama of enchantment."[128] As has been seen, Charles Warren Eaton, working in Thompson in the northeastern corner of Connecticut, produced his soaring, dreamlike visions of white pine trees, the very best executed between 1900 and 1910. Branchville, just north of Cos Cob, was home to J. Alden Weir, whose farm not provided not only inspiration for his first important forays into landscape subjects (see *Lengthening Shadows*, 1887, fig. 5.78) but also a spiritual resource that sustained him throughout his career. Weir was one of the few Tonalists who managed convincingly to aestheticize the New England mill town in his art without giving in to the picturesque. His hilly farm also prompted similar explorations into landscape by Weir's friends, Albert Pinkham Ryder (see *Weir's Orchard*, c. 1890, fig. 4.51), William Lathrop (see *Trees on a Hillside*, fig. 5.28, and *Hillside Patterns*, fig. 5.29, both c. 1890s), and Henry Snell. In the old Colonial village of Litchfield, north of Branchville, Tonalist artist Alexander Van Laer (see *Sunset Trees*, c. 1900, fig. 8.69 and *The Meadow*, c. 1910, fig. 6.12; *Fall Fields*, c. 1900, p. 431) produced serene renditions of the low-lying hills and spare farm country surrounding the town. Up the Housatonic River in Cornwall Hollow, near the Massachusetts state line and the Berkshire Hills, Ben Foster painted his extraordinary rambling landscapes, including *Brook in the Woods*, circa 1910 (fig. 8.70). Watercolorist James

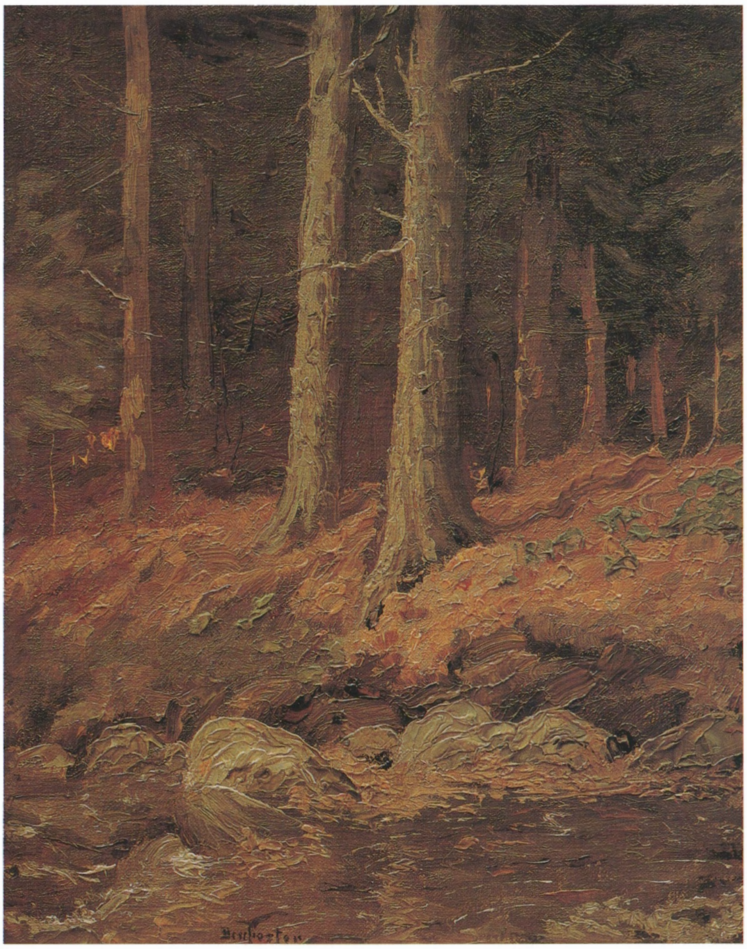


Fig. 8.70. Ben Foster, *Brook in the Woods*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 15 x 12 in. Private collection.

Moser (see *Dusk*, c. 1905, fig. 5.36), also summered and painted in Cornwall Hollow, while Hugh Bolton Jones painted just across the state line in South Egremont, Massachusetts. Walter Nettleton, famed for his winter scenes, made his home in nearby Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Stockbridge and Walter Nettleton, 1861–1936

A longtime resident of Stockbridge, the all-but-forgotten Tonalist painter Walter Nettleton was trained abroad by the best Parisian teachers—Boulanger, Lefebvre, and Carolus-Duran. He was so captivated by the atmospheric light of Brittany, however, that on his return to America, he jettisoned figurative subjects, which had won him an honorable mention at the Salon of 1892, and opted to pursue exquisite, soft-toned landscapes, eventually becoming a master of the winterscape. Even before his salon accolade in 1892, Nettleton exhibited landscapes at the Society of American Artists in 1891, a telling indicator of the market demand for his work. He showed six Breton genre subjects at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893—an extraordinary number for a young artist and a reflection of the high regard he had already achieved in American art circles. But even Nettleton's early Breton subjects of laboring peasants tended to be a mere pretext for the depiction of the fine atmospheric effects and subtle tonalities obtained under the pearl-gray skies of Brittany, something an 1894 review by Charles de Kay of a Society of American Artists exhibition readily acknowledges. "Walter Nettleton brings from his studies in Brittany a knitting peasant woman with the title 'December Sunshine,' [honorable mention, Salon of 1892] but he, too, is in the modern way of avoiding a story, as indeed the title indicates. Very charmingly has he painted the outline of the woman's head gilded with pale sunshine, the homely, but pleasing features, in the shadow, of the head itself. The same excellent observation and trained hand appear in 'Teasel Gatherer on the Edge of Downs,' which hangs in the Vanderbilt Gallery." This is high praise from de Kay, with his strong dislike of storytelling painting, and he noted almost gleefully in the same review that "definite subjects are out of fashion, and the fear of being caught in an anecdote or being literary seems really to oppress the guild."[129]

With Whistler's influence only growing stronger in the 1890s, it is not surprising that Nettleton soon abandoned genre subjects to concentrate on delicate landscapes of great refinement. The artist settled in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, sometime before 1900, where he began interpreting the delicate light of winter effects with absolute devotion for more than thirty years. A *New York Times* review by de Kay of the Society of American Artists annual exhibition of 1899 called Nettleton's *Breaking Up of Winter—Stockbridge* (date and location unknown) "one of the strongest landscapes shown, with rich color, quality, and splendid light effects."[130] *Winter Light*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.71), epitomizes Nettleton's focus on light effects, especially the subdued, low-angled light of the winter season, which approximated, in terms of the spectrum of tonality, the atmospheric light he had experienced during painting excursions to Brittany in his years of training in Paris. Alexander Harrison, with whom he had studied in Paris, would have certainly encouraged Nettleton in the exquisite dissection of ephemeral lighting effects under cloud-saturated or sunset conditions, as well as the naturalistic feeling for crystalline atmosphere that had been the hallmark of Jules Bastien-Lepage in the early 1880s. The winter season with its cold clear air was well suited for the exploration of such qualities. *Winter Light* also exhibits the artist's academic virtuosity in the rendering of a complex composition that records the varied play of light on multiple planes, some receding, shadowed and angled, as in the close-up foreground with the dull luster of melting ice on snow, or the reflected light in the stream, which bathes the bankside plants in soft hovering haloes of russet gray, and the scrim of middle-ground trees shimmering with hazy, opalescent forms. The distant snowy hillside catches the last of the daylight in a display of mottled yet resplendent luminescent color against

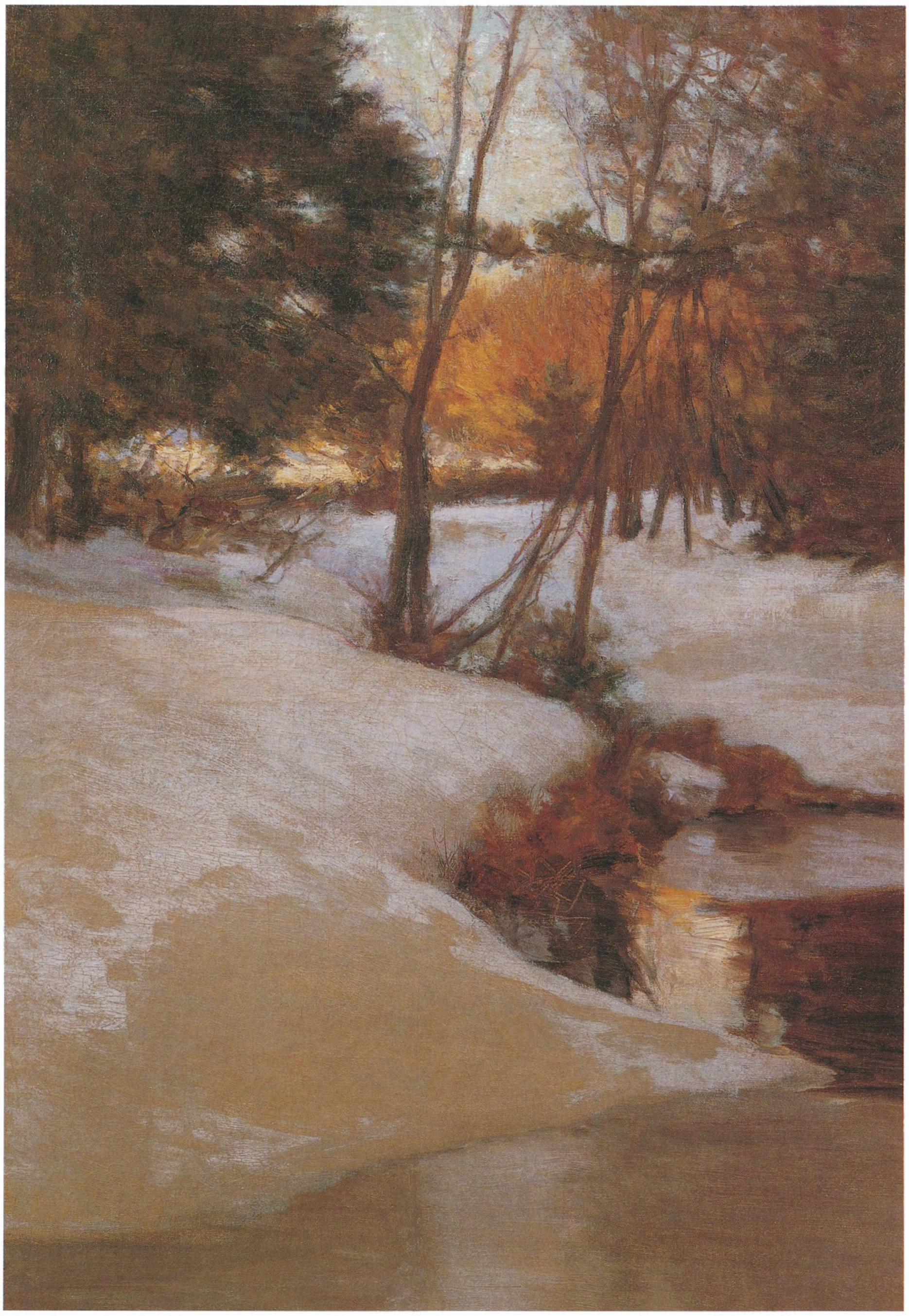


Fig. 8.71. Walter Nettleton, *Winter Light,* c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 30 x 28 in. Private collection.

the snow. Nettleton has composed his scene with eye-catching juxtapositions of simple forms and generalized masses, hard-edged contours against softer-edged planes of atmospheric light, using the butt end of his brush to scratch in details here and there. Quivering lilac tones are found in the shadows of the trees, while the various greens in the branches above shimmer and vibrate as if caressed by an invisible breeze. The acuteness of observation is breathtaking and yet the harmonic whole—the feeling for atmosphere and the quiet eliding of the natural cycles from one season to the next is equally spellbinding.

Nettleton's academic finesse, coupled with his feel for the merging of amorphous form and evanescent light in nature, clearly captivated Charles de Kay, who loved nothing more than finding European technique directed to it proper and most propitious ends—elucidating the mysterious beauty of the American landscape. As he was often prone to do, de Kay recommended Nettleton for the Shaw Fund Prize at the Society of American Artists annual exhibition of 1904: "Mr. Walter Nettleton is a landscapist who shines this year; he is another candidate recommendable to the generous donor of the Shaw Fund. Mark in the Central Gallery, No. 156, 'The Farm Lane,' a snowscape with the precious quality of opals. It registers the wonderful color of our landscape when the sheet of white throws out the tones of rocks, clay banks, tree trunks,

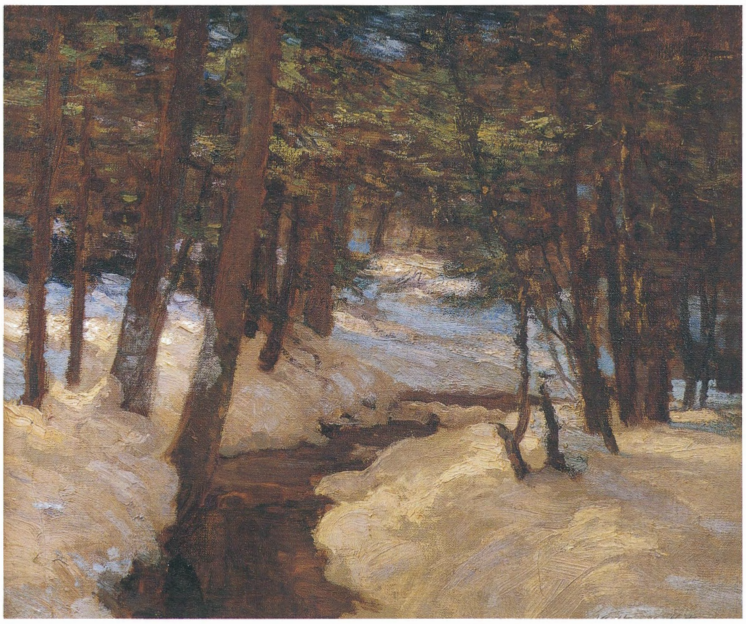


Fig. 8.72. Walter Nettleton, *A Woodland Brook*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 15 x 18 in. Private collection.

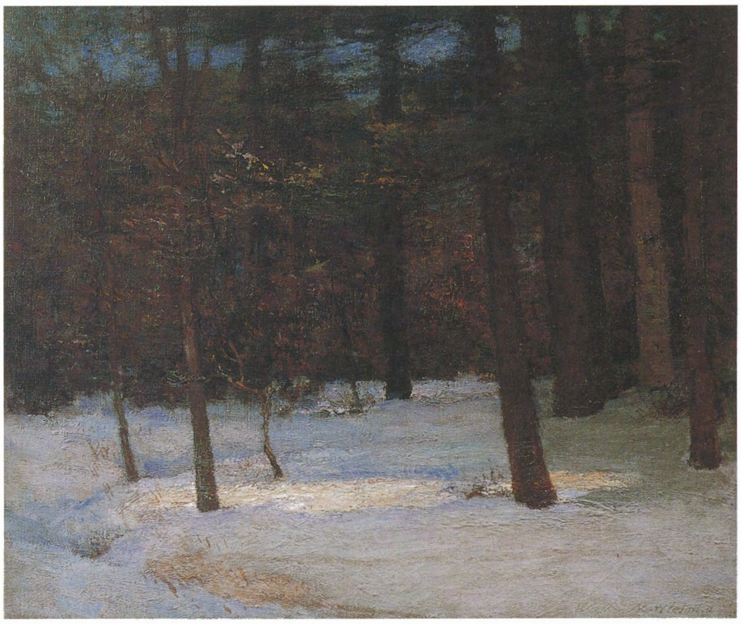


Fig. 8.73. Walter Nettleton, *Winter Pines*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in. Private collection.

withered shrubs and weeds."[131] Though missing out on the 1904 Shaw Fund Prize, Nettleton was awarded a medal at the Saint Louis Exposition that same year.

For the next thirty years or so, Nettleton remained in Stockbridge and dedicated himself to the New England landscape, specializing in what he termed "studies of our New England Winter effects...."[132] If anything, after 1900 he narrowed the subject of his compositions even further, focusing on secluded nooks in the winter forest where the stark trunks and blurry branches of pines stood out against a snowy background. *A Woodland Brook*, circa 1910 (fig. 8.72), displays Nettleton's fascination with dissecting the vast array of tones reflected off snow-covered surfaces—here pinks, grays, blues, and violets—which in turn transform the immediate surroundings by creating prismatic micro-atmospheres. The snowbound stream and icy banks become a natural prism, absorbing and reflecting filtered and direct light. Nettleton's passion for capturing fleeting, activated colors in nature is reminiscent, in its single-mindedness and dedication, of the young John La Farge working in Newport in the 1860s, (see *Snow Weather*, 1869, fig. 1.21). It also recalls the great poet-naturalist of the New England landscape, Henry Thoreau. "About half an hour before sunset....I observe all the sheets of ice (and they abound everywhere now in the fields), when I look from one side about at right angles with the sun's rays, reflect a green light....I begin to see a pink light....This gradually deepens to purple and violet in some places, and the pink is very distinct...."[133]

Winter Pines, circa 1910 (fig. 8.73), is an example of another of Nettleton's Thoreau-like preoccupations: the capturing and analysis of scintillating light passing through layers of pine boughs. Thoreau observed in his journal that "in the cool Novemberish air and light we observe and enjoy the trembling shimmer and gleam of the pine-needles. I do not know why we perceive this more at this season, unless because the air is so clear and all surfaces reflect more light; and, besides, all the needles now left are fresh ones...for the pine...has not merely beauty of outline and color,—it is not merely an amorphous and homogeneous or continuous mass of green,—but shows a regular succession of flattish leafy boughs or stages, in flakes one above another, like the veins of a leaf or the leaflets of a frond; it is this richness and symmetry of detail which, more than its outline, charms us . . . that fine silver light reflected from its needles (perhaps their undersides) incessantly in motion...like the play and flashing of electricity."[134] Thoreau's journals are filled with such patient insights into the splendid, multi-dimensional beauties of the white pine, full of metaphors and similes—and above all, the feeling for movement, for light as energy, for changing color and tone reflecting not just the ever-changing seasons but also the underlying spirit-force of metamorphosis.

Through Thoreau's words we capture something of the obsessive intensity that clearly infused Nettleton's art. The horizontal, coruscating scrims of activated color and light in *Winter Pines*, acting like a visible electric current flowing through the pine boughs, have a near-hallucinatory quality, as if the invisible quantum energies of creation are being made visible. Academic in skill and exactitude, Nettleton's painting is full of jazzy brushwork, more visionary than realistic: he transcends the picturesque with a near-mystical interpretation of the natural world in tone and light. Though Nettleton seems to have strayed as far as California to paint (he was on

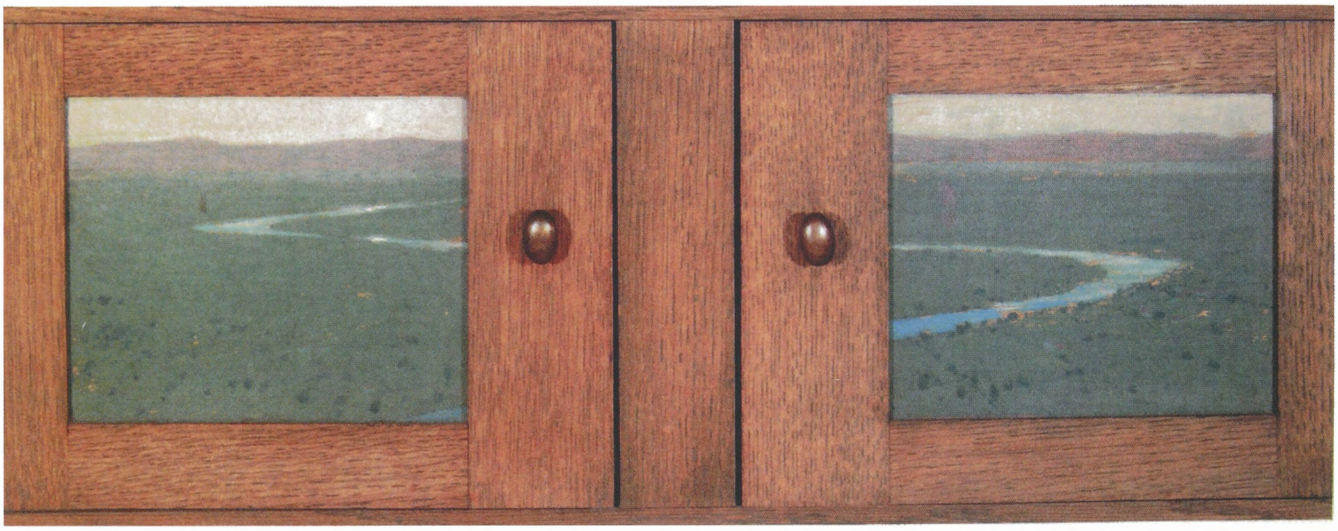


Fig. 8.74. Detail of chiffonier with landscape by Hermann Dudley Murphy, c. 1904. Oak with painted panels. Private collection.

the advisory committee for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915), he remained firmly focused on his native ground of New England. His year-round residence in Stockbridge, and the single-mindedness of his preoccupations with Whistlerian aesthetics and Transcendentalist insights into nature—as more vigorous interpreters of winter's glory like Redfield and Bellows arrived on the scene by 1910, may have resulted in the foundering of what was a stellar reputation in his day.

Woodstock and the Tonalist Legacy of Birge Harrison; John Carlson, 1874–1945

Woodstock, a small rural village in the Catskill Mountains of New York, was transformed into an artist's colony in 1902–03 by the creative energies of Ralph Radcliffe Whitehead, his wife, Jane Byrd McCall, the writer Hervey White, and the artist Bolton Brown. Inspired by John Ruskin's ideas of an arts community and William Morris's social ideals centered on the Arts and Crafts movement, Whitehead used his inherited wealth to buy land in Woodstock; he was entranced by its views and proximity to New York. Whitehead's intent was to establish a purpose-built community for the production of handmade furniture, decorative arts, and paintings. In 1903, Whitehead hired the Boston-based artist and fellow Whistler-enthusiast Hermann Dudley Murphy to teach painting at Byrdcliffe, the name given to the new art colony. Murphy stayed for only one summer, returning to Boston to join forces with Charles Prendergast in a framing business, Carrig-Rohanne, which they established in Boston. Murphy also painted decorative landscapes for furniture produced at Byrdcliffe (fig. 8.74), one of many examples of the cross-pollination taking place between Tonalism as a style concentrating on abstract form, mellifluous design, and a strong graphic reading, and the simplification of form and function characteristic of the Arts and Crafts movement.

In the summer of 1904, Birge Harrison, another artist who also painted decorative landscapes for furniture produced at Byrdcliffe, took over the teaching duties at the colony, bringing his international reputation and penchant for Tonalist landscapes of rare misty beauty, especially his love of snow scenes, for which he was known in some quarters as the "Painter of the Snows." After twelve years spent working in France, Harrison returned to America, painting at locales in Santa Barbara, California, for six years, Plymouth, Massachusetts, and Quebec for a number of winters. *Sunset from Quebec*, circa 1895 (see fig. 3.74), exemplifies Harrison's ability to integrate the academic finesse of his Paris training with a deeply felt spiritual kinship for nature's moods, in addition to a knack for design and subtle patterning in his compositions that make his work a feast for the emotion and the discriminating eye. Of his work in Quebec, Harrison noted, "I've painted pretty much all over

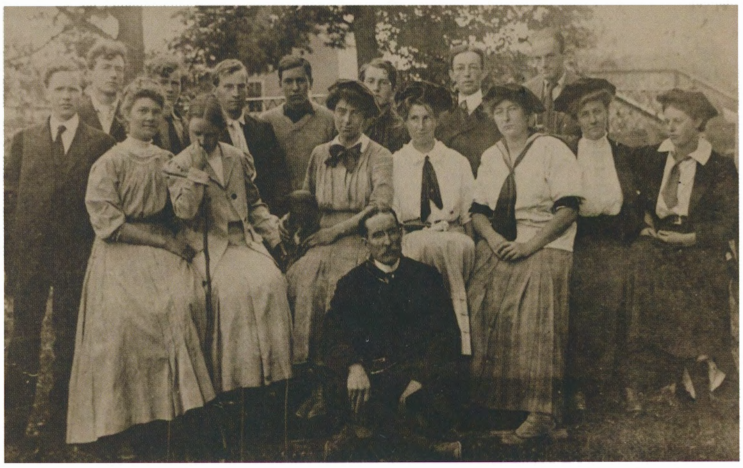


Fig. 8.75. Photograph of Birge Harrison with Art Students League summer class, 1909. Konrad and Florence Ballin Cramer Papers, 1897–1968, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

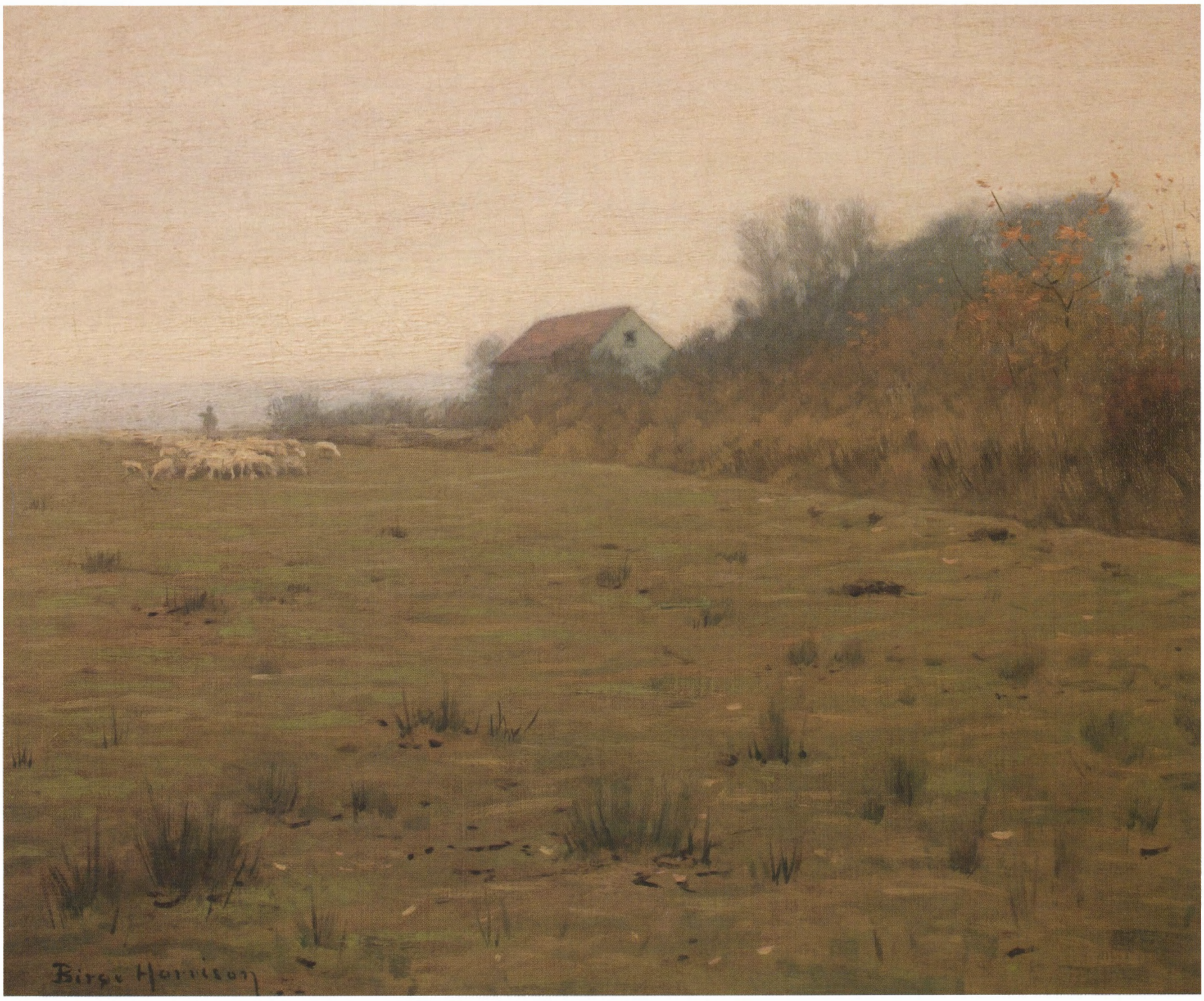


Fig. 8.76. Birge Harrison, *Woodstock Farm*, c. 1908. Oil on canvas, 19 x 23 in. Private collection.

the world, but nowhere have I found such a mine of exquisite material."[135] Perhaps no painter of his generation was able to combine such finesse of design, acuity of execution, and depth of emotion, a point emphasized by colleague Arthur Hoeber in 1911: "One is conscious in looking at his canvases that the scene has strongly appealed, that the painter has saturated himself with the subject, has studied just the best lines in a composition suited to bring out his idea, while he has evolved his color scheme much from within him, and more as a souvenir of the effect than the concrete rendering of the particular tints that were before him."[136]

Harrison was a painter's painter and an inspiration to thousands of students. Harrison spent only one summer at Byrdcliffe, replaced the following summer of 1905 by another Tonalist, Leonard Ochtman; but in the summer of 1906 Harrison was appointed head of the Woodstock summer school of the Art Students League of New York. Hundreds of students would arrive annually for the league's summer sessions and before long Woodstock became a thriving artists' colony, which it continues to be to this day (fig. 8.75). Birge Harrison's determination to focus entirely on landscape at Woodstock was yet another sign, not only of the dominance of the Tonalist landscape in the first decade of the new century but also of America's embrace of landscape as its defining art form. Under Harrison, training in landscape painting was given the kind of serious attention once reserved for figurative art. Harrison's example and inspiration would be taken up by summer art schools across America; prominent artists like Chase, Dow, Snell, Lathrop, Redfield, and Henri all participated in summer art programs in various picturesque quarters of the country. The art of landscape had become *the* national art. Harrison's many students spread his Tonalist gospel (codified in his book *Landscape Painting*, published in 1909) across America in the years before World War I.

Harrison was so stirred by the beauties of Woodstock that he bought a local farm where he remained until his death in 1929. *Woodstock Farm*, circa 1908 (fig. 8.76), plumbs the depths of his home ground, by a combination of rarefied tonal effects and compositional subtleties that gives his work a spiritual profundity far beyond what his humble subject matter might otherwise have suggested. Something of the contemporary appreciation for Harrison's familiar yet evocative landscapes—traditional but at the same time up-to-date—is found in a *Scribner's Magazine* article of 1907: "In all his recent work one finds bigness of theme, combined with simplicity of presentation, and through it all runs a deep current of sentiment, governed by an appreciation of the mechanical limitations of his medium which makes for proper restraint . . . [I]t is not without real pleasure that the opportunity comes for calm contemplation of nature in her familiar aspect, guided by a sure hand and a seeing eye, and illuminated by reverent understanding of both the physical and the mental charm which is always present in the landscape."[137]

Charles Caffin suggested in a 1915 review of an exhibition of the brothers Alexander and Birge Harrison that Birge, the younger of the two, who opted to make his career in America, ultimately surpassed the artistry of his expatriate brother, who had the larger international reputation in their heyday. In the comparative exhibition, Caffin was taken with Birge Harrison's added insights into the "subtleties of nature's appearances. I wonder if this has anything to do with his having lived and worked as he matured in this country, while his brother has been more closely identified with France . . . [W]hile France is a valuable forcing-house of talent, the best place for them to mature is in the country to which they belong. Its conditions, artistically considered, are harder, and for that very reason likely to foster a stouter growth."[138] Caffin's appraisal of Birge Harrison seems borne out by time as does his insight into the importance of homegrown attachments to the flourishing of the finest Tonalist artists. In addition to his achievements as a Tonalist painter, Birge Harrison probably ranks as one of the very finest pastelists of his generation. *New York Harbor*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.77), displays a consumate feel for the medium, encompassing a breathtaking rendering of the muted grays and blues of dusk with an array of bewitching decorative patterns in the water: beautiful as pure design and ever hinting at the invisible forces of wind and tide. Harrison was one of the few Tonalist painters to excel at urban landscapes, drawing near to Whistler's sensuous views of Venice and London; his winterscapes of New York, in which the hard edges of the city are blurred by snow, fog, and twilight, are unparalleled.

Harrison taught the Art Students League summer school for five seasons until 1911, and though of an older generation, was scrupulously undogmatic in his teaching, always encouraging individuality (de Kay's sine qua non) in his students. The ASL Woodstock landscape school was, in Harrison's estimation, the crucial and distinctive institutional achievement in American art of his day, something the hidebound Europeans had failed to do. He described Woodstock's speedy growth and success in producing first rate landscapists as, "phenomenal. . . . The location, to begin with, was a very fortunate choice, for the broad valley of Woodstock combines an immense variety of landscape features." More to the point, Harrison considered landscape painting to be *the* progressive force in modern art, and America's peculiar strength. By focusing exclusively on the techniques of landscape painting, the Woodstock school promoted the Tonalist landscape in its heyday, teaching, as Harrison observed, "the 'big vision'—the power to see and to render the whole of a given scene or picture motive, rather than to paint a still-life picture of its component parts; the power to give the essential and to suppress the inessential, the power to paint the atmosphere which surrounds the objects rather than the objects themselves, the power, in a word, to give the 'mood' of a motive rather than a scientific statement of the trees and rocks and fields and mountains that make up its elements."[139] (See Birge Harrison, *Silence*, c. 1890, chapter 7, p. 428.)

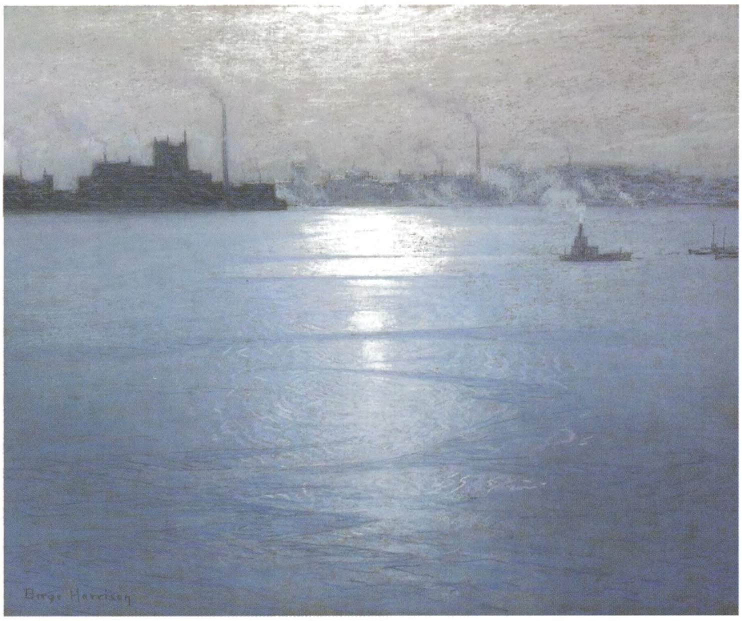


Fig. 8.77. Birge Harrison, *New York Harbor*, c. 1900. Pastel, 24 x 30 in. Courtesy Avery Galleries, Bryn Mawr, PA.

Harrison, who had begun his studies in Paris in the early 1880s, had seen it all in his lifetime. From the perspective of his 1909 book *Landscape Painting*, he felt that the Americans, certainly in French eyes, had established an "American School" by 1885, and a new point of view, "whose chief characteristic was an unusual directness and clarity of vision, coupled with a corresponding simplicity of statement." Harrison noted the comments of a French artist on this matter: "You Americans have one advantage over all others. You have no traditions. You can look straight at nature out of your own eyes, while our vision is clouded and obscured by the inheritance of a thousand years." Harrison picked out Homer, Martin, La Farge, Inness, and Wyant—and his brother, Alexander Harrison—as exemplars of individual temperament (the source of a

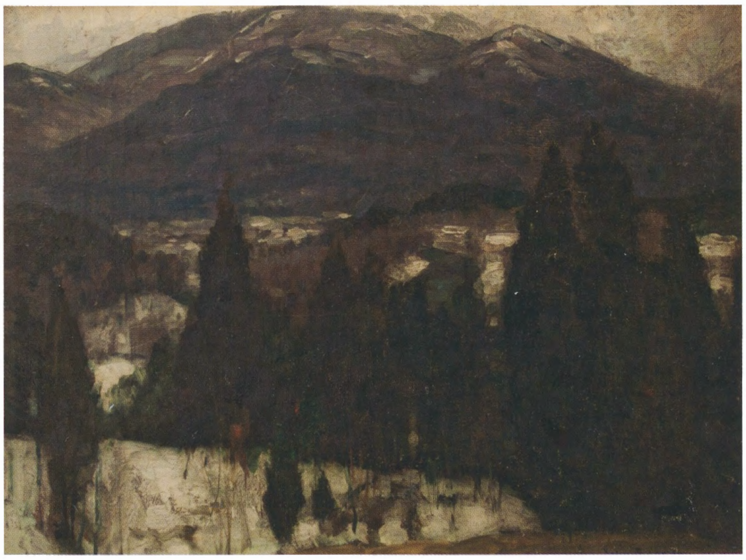


Fig. 8.78. John Carlson, *Quiet Valleys*, c. 1920. Oil on board, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

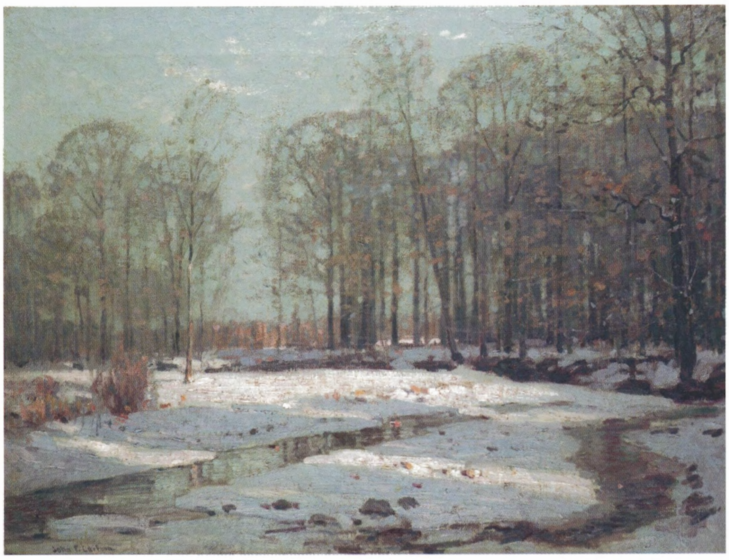


Fig. 8.79. John Carlson, *The Sawkill in Winter*, c. 1920. Oil on canvas, 18¼ x 24¼ in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

distinctive American quality), estimating that that there were three to four times the number of outstanding American artists working in 1909 than 1885, and of those, fully two-thirds were landscapists. Birge Harrison explained the American artist's interest in landscape as a result of the genre's plethora of "unsolved problems," and because it was so alive to further development, unlike figurative painting. "This shifting of the balance is most significant, for it shows a new drift, a tendency on the part of our artists to carry their easels out into the open; to paint, or to try to paint, all of the shimmering, iridescent effects that happen only under the great blue arch of the sky; the glory of the noonday sunlight, the pale beauty of the dawn, the golden glow of sunset and the brooding mystery of night. . . . The fact is that the open has claimed us as a people! We devote ourselves with ever-increasing enthusiasm to out-of-door pleasures and out-of-door beauty. It is our best achievement as a nation; and our artists in this are, therefore, simply keeping step with the march of modern civilization."[140]

When he retired from full-time teaching in 1911, Harrison turned the directorship of the league's summer program over to his longtime student and friend John Carlson (1874–1945). Carlson taught the Art Students League classes until 1918, moving out west for a time, only to return to Woodstock and set up his own school, the John Fabian Carlson School of Landscape Painting, which he ran until his death in 1945. Carlson's textbook on landscape painting, *Elementary Principles of Landscape Painting*, first published in 1929, which incorporates much of the practical advice Carlson first learned from Harrison, has gone through numerous printings and is considered a classic in the field, gaining enthusiastic readers to this day. Carlson was a popular and very influential teacher and landscape painter, taking on the Tonalist sensibilities of his mentor, Birge Harrison, while evolving a more vigorous style and bold sinuous handling of natural forms, much in keeping with Bellows and late Henri. *Quiet Valleys*, circa 1920 (fig. 8.78), displays the quietist mood of classic Tonalism but with a broadly brushed and invigorated facture. A snow scene like *The Sawkill in Winter*, circa 1920 (fig. 8.79), is a perfect example of the continuation of the Tonalist aesthetic into the 1920s, as it was transformed by artists like Chauncey Ryder and Gardner Symons, in addition to Carlson, into renderings of nature with bold impasto and strong tactile values, demonstrating that a poetic use of tone and a powerful handling of paint could produce works of both abstract complexity and stirring emotion.

Philadelphia and the New Hope School of Landscape Painting: William Lathrop, Henry Snell, and Edward Redfield

Before 1900, the Philadelphia area never produced the critical mass of Tonalist-inspired landscape painting found in New York, or Boston or even San Francisco. The figurative academic tradition under Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts may have had much to do with a relative lack of interest in landscape painting in Philadelphia, although the inroads of Tonalism from the 1880s on were widespread. Almost all of Eakins's work has a distinct tonal feel and he employed glazes to tone down his figurative, landscape, and portrait works (many now over-cleaned), especially his rowing scenes along the Schuylkill River. Eakins's recording of sunlight reflected off the smooth river surfaces over which his rowers glide has a family resemblance to Alexander Harrison's luminous marines. Both Birge and Alexander Harrison had ties to Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Academy, and later to artists working in New Hope. Alexander Harrison's Tonalist marines and Birge Harrison's landscapes, especially his winter landscapes, made frequent appearances at the annual exhibitions of the

Pennsylvania Academy around 1900 and were highly regarded. The Paris-based expatriate artist Alexander Harrison's near-iconic and prizewinning *The Wave* (see fig. 3.41), was bought by the Academy in 1891—a work that inspired legions of imitators on both sides of the Atlantic. Another expatriate Philadelphian, Charles Fromuth, also a student of Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, went to study in Paris and ended up living in Concarneau for his entire career; he was influenced by Harrison's marines and produced some of the finest Tonalist pastels after Whistler and Henry Muhrman. William Sartain, from an old Philadelphia family of artists, was an early stalwart of the Society of American Artists and teacher at the Art Students League; Sartain's exquisite Tonalist landscapes, combining the draftsmanship learned under Gérôme with a very New York feel for Aesthetic Tonalism, were inspirations to generations of League students. Robert Henri, along with five Philadelphians of The Eight, studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, began as illustrators, and moved into the New York art world where they retained a multiple allegiance to the figurative tradition of Eakins, the narrative drama of newspaper illustration, and the Whistlerian tonal aesthetic in vogue around 1900. Philadelphia never developed the critical mass of Tonalist landscape painters—the academic figurative tradition of Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts looming ever large—of New York and Boston, but its roundabout contributions to Tonalism from its expatriate painters, New York converts, and its satellite colony in nearby New Hope was far-reaching.

It was in the small town of New Hope, up the Delaware River from Philadelphia, that the first significant school of Tonalist landscape painting in the Philadelphia area was established by William Lathrop (fig. 8.80) and further reinforced by William Redfield, and later Henry Snell. Scenes along the Delaware in the New Hope area—the farms, villages, canals, and panoramic views of the river—became staples of what would be known as the New Hope or Bucks County School of landscape. Lathrop, born in 1859, and Snell in 1858, were at the heart of the prime generation of Tonalists, while Redfield, born in 1869, was in the succeeding generation, and, like so many born after 1865, Redfield shifted to an Impressionist palette over the first decade of the new century. Success came late to Lathrop, and he struggled mightily in the 1880s and early 1890s to sustain his artistic bent; when success came, it came fast—spurred by winning the Evans Prize at the American Watercolor Society in 1896—and Lathrop became one of the finest Tonalist interpreters of landscape well into the 1930s. Lathrop moved permanently to Phillips Mill along the Delaware in 1899, where he painted and taught for decades, while his influence made itself felt on scores of New Hope–based artists, though most employed variations on academic Impressionism as the new century unfolded.

Lathrop, an astute etcher and draftstman (he made a living early in his career as an illustrator and print maker), was a versatile handler of paint. In the 1890s he could paint tight yet expressive Tonalist landscapes with a rare shimmering beauty and haunting evocations of place and time of day. *Along the Delaware River*, 1896 (fig. 8.81), is a finely wrought and intimate example of Lathrop's work before 1900: relatively tight in handling, wonderfully composed along the lines of Aesthetic Tonalism practiced by progressive artists in New York, and possessed of a lyricism, equipoise, and feeling for warm light on the ploughed fields overlooking the Delaware; unlike the hardscrabble farm of his Ohio youth, it speaks of profound joy. *Hackensack Meadow*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.82), offers another example of Lathrop's early focus on exquisite vignettes of nature, full of expressive detail and deft compositional dynamics. After 1900, Lathrop's paint handling grew bolder and more exuberant—he had a graphic artist's talent for teasing out the essential energies of a composition—as he made the transition from Aesthetic Tonalism to Expressive Tonalism, also exploring aspects of Impressionistic facture, while retaining a tonal feel for the power of large landscape forms in his finest work. *An Abandoned Quarry, Bucks County*, circa 1910 (fig. 8.83), displays the artist's broader late style, full of energetic yet muted paint handling, in which the lush, soft-edged rhythmic masses set off a few linear tree forms to reinforce the stark autumnal feel of the landscape: a channeling of pure emotion by a master of understatement. Lathrop, a lover of sailing and the sea, also spent much time on Long Island painting along the shoreline, his scintillating coastal views often bathed in mist and fog. Tragically, Lathrop lost his life in the great hurricane of 1938 while out on his small boat.

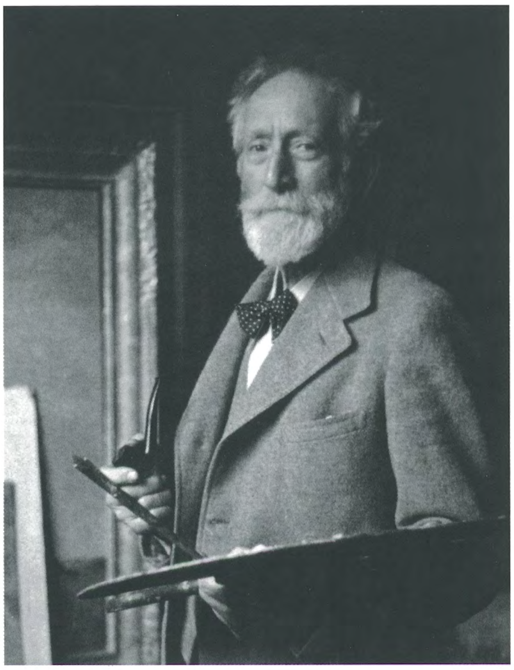


Fig. 8.80. William Lathrop, undated photograph.

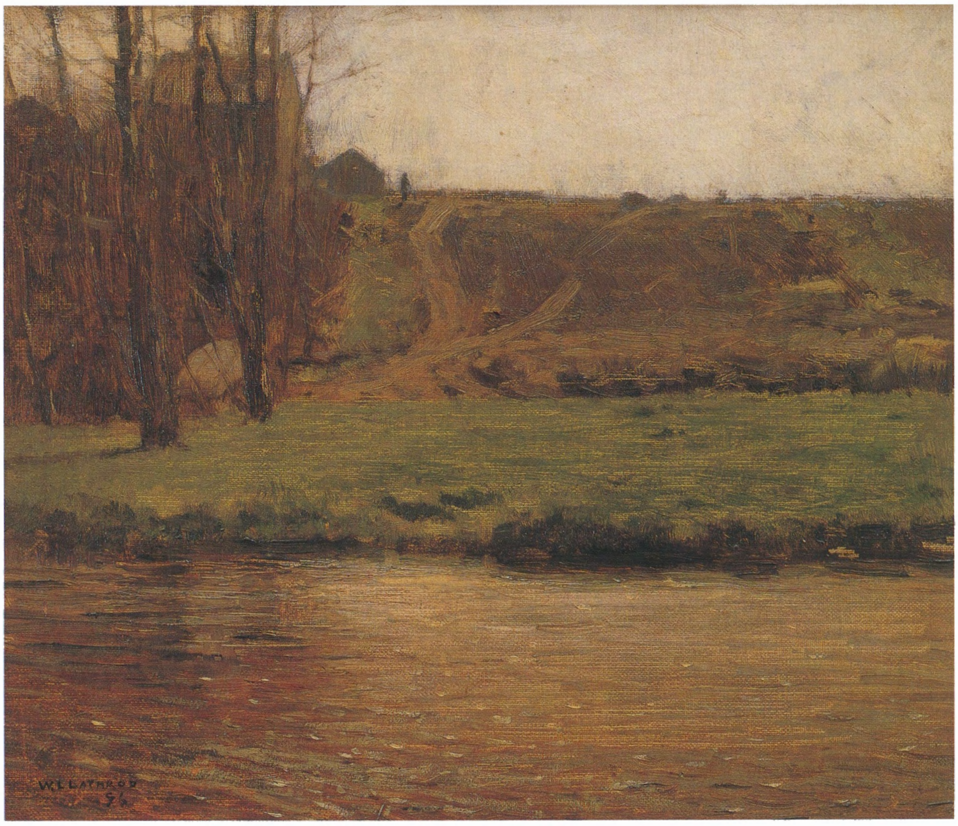


Fig. 8.81. William Lathrop, *Along the Delaware River*, 1896. Oil on canvas, 12 x 14 in. Private collection.

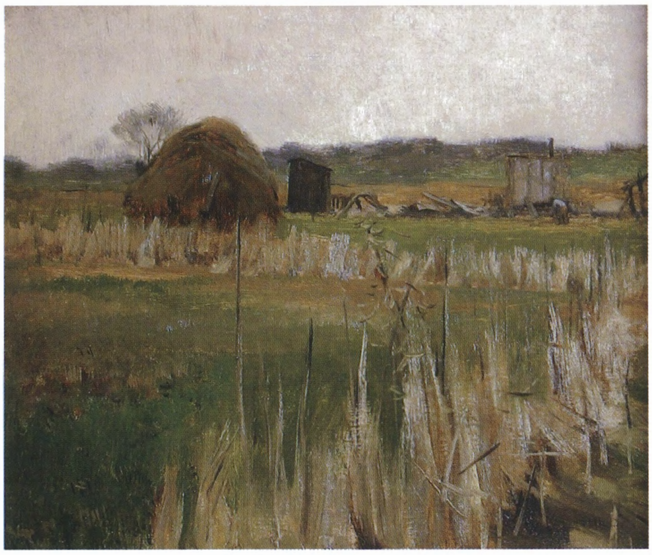


Fig. 8.82. William Lathrop, *Hackensack Meadow*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 12 x 14 in. Collection of Jack and Mary Ann Hollihan.

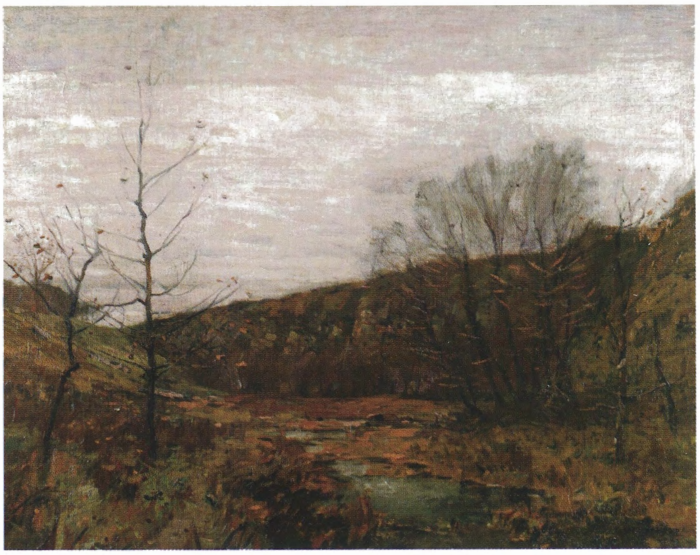


Fig. 8.83. William Lathrop, *An Abandoned Quarry, Bucks County*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Courtesy Hawthorne Fine Arts.

Henry Snell (fig. 8.84), a longtime close friend of Lathrop, also loved painting maritime views, especially coastal scenes, shipping, and harbors. His reputation, which was prominent in the New York art world before 1900, today rests largely on his connection to New Hope and his Impressionist-style views of the town and various ports along the coasts of Cornwall, England, Massachusetts, and Maine. He took up a teaching position in 1899 at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, and later became a resident of New Hope around 1925. His early fame as a tireless promoter and experimenter in watercolor was reflected in his extraordinary coup of simultaneously holding the position of president of both the American Watercolor Society and the New York Water Color Club, one-time rivals. In 1903, critic Charles Caffin wrote glowingly of Snell's watercolors as "a medium in which he particularly excels, obtaining from it the extreme

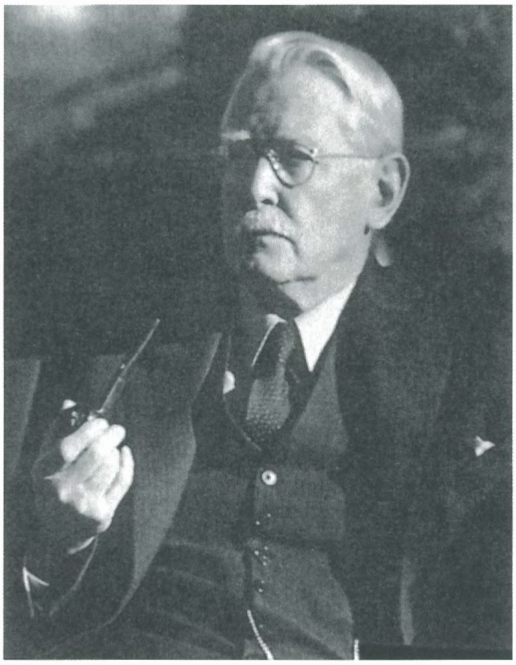


Fig. 8.84. Henry Snell, undated photograph.

capacity of pictorial expression, yet without any loss of the purity and translucence of color which are the most distinctive characteristics of the medium.”[141] His role as assistant director of the National Committee of the Fine Arts for the American display at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900 was crucial to the inclusion of many of the up-and-coming important Tonalists of the day, including his friends Twachtman, Weir, Lathrop, Charles Warren Eaton, Ben Foster, and Leonard Ochtman.

Snell’s early work from around the turn of the century (including *Italian Hillside*, c. 1905, fig. 8.85) demonstrates a rare feeling for tonal values and the dexterous design sense inherent in Aesthetic Tonalism, which give his work a beguiling abstract airiness and graphic quality of design. It may be that the flat, planar look he tried to employ in his watercolors influenced, or was influenced by, his work in oil. His early oils from his days working in New York, such as *Under the Bow, Venice*, circa 1900 (see fig. 4.3), have a flat, two-dimensional feel in the painted forms, and quirky yet revealing angles of vision—much more innovative than his late work, which tended to be more conventional in subject and style. Snell’s passion for the sea was noted by Charles Caffin, who considered the artist one of the greatest painters of seascapes in his generation. “He is by the strongest conviction of his nature a marine painter; the love of the sea is in his blood, and being himself of a gentle, dreamy temperament, he is attracted especially by the qualities of mystery; the mysteriousness of vaporous atmosphere and of spots of solitude along the shore, where the flight of the sea-bird alone disturbs the eternal communing of the waves upon the rocks.” Extolling a marine subject by Snell, Caffin wrote, “It represents an exquisite harmony of delicate tonality, vibrating with a subdued color, establishing Snell as a colorist of more than ordinary sensibility; while the clarity and penetrableness of the veils of vapor reveal his mastery of atmospheric expression.”[142]

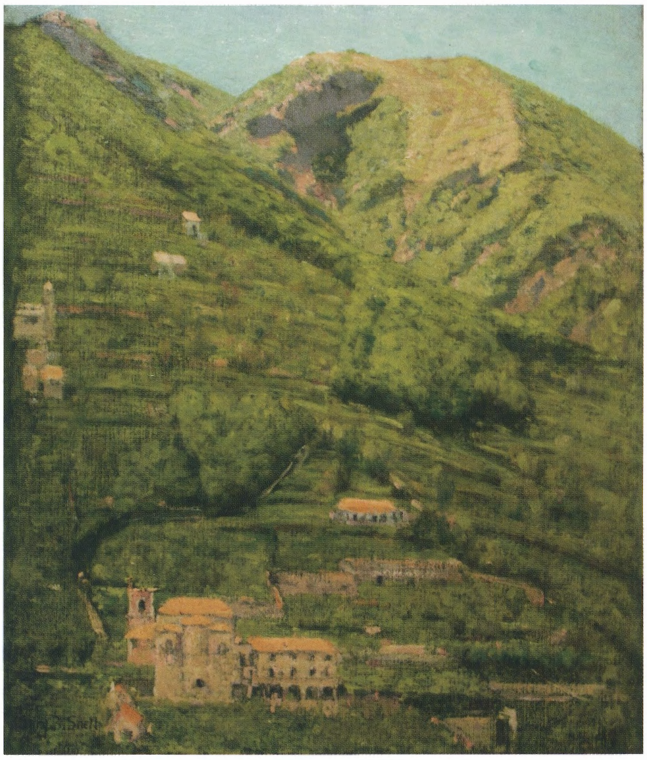


Fig. 8.85. Henry Snell, *Italian Hillside*, c. 1905. Oil on canvas, 13 x 11 in. Private collection.

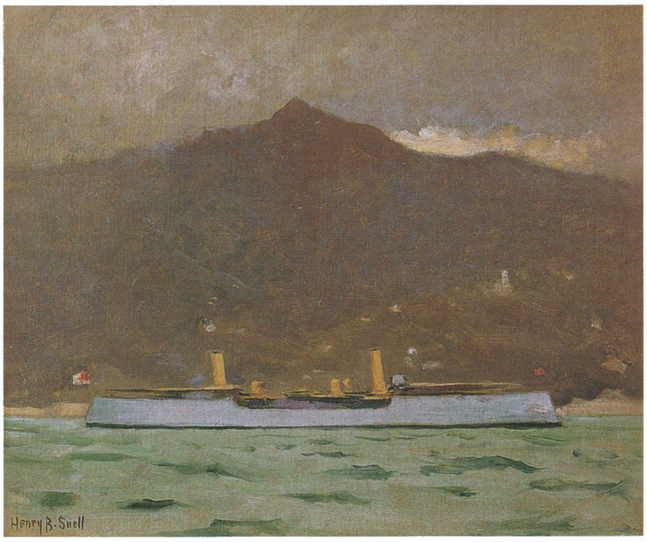


Fig. 8.86. Henry Snell, *Yellow Funnels*, c. 1900. Oil on board, 9 x 11 in. Private Collection.

Yellow Funnels, circa 1900 (fig. 8.86), reflects not just Snell’s lifelong passion for nautical subjects but also his joyousness in expressive low-toned facture, which often provides backdrops to his main subjects—here a moored battleship—a style that allows for both clarity of subject and an absorbing ambiguity of form, translating the otherwise picturesque into a compelling visual and tactile puzzle of color relationships. Even a fairly

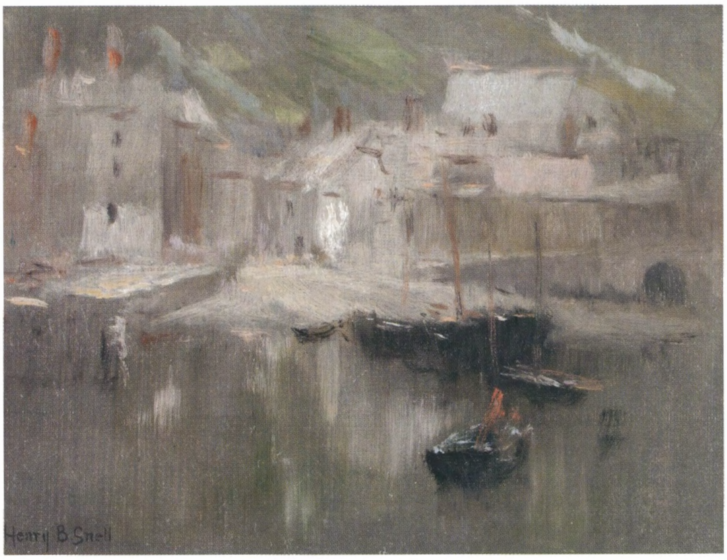


Fig. 8.87. Henry Snell, *Foggy Morning*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas board, 7 x 9 in. Private collection.

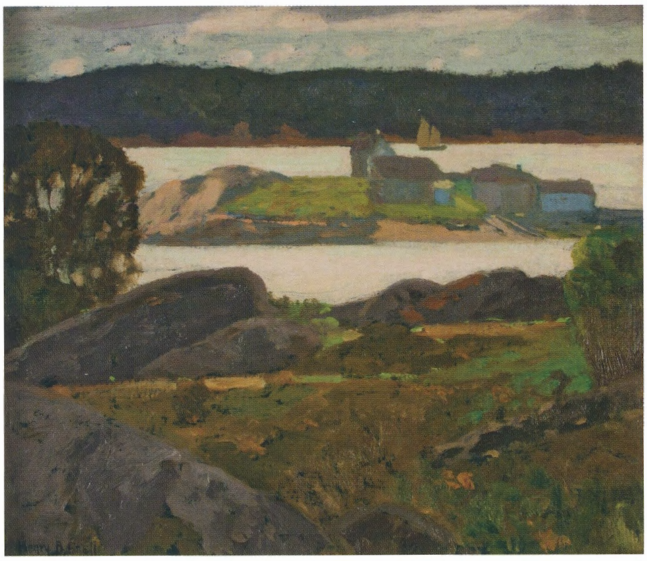


Fig. 8.88. Henry Snell, *Ten Pound Island*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas board, 12 x 13 in. Private collection.

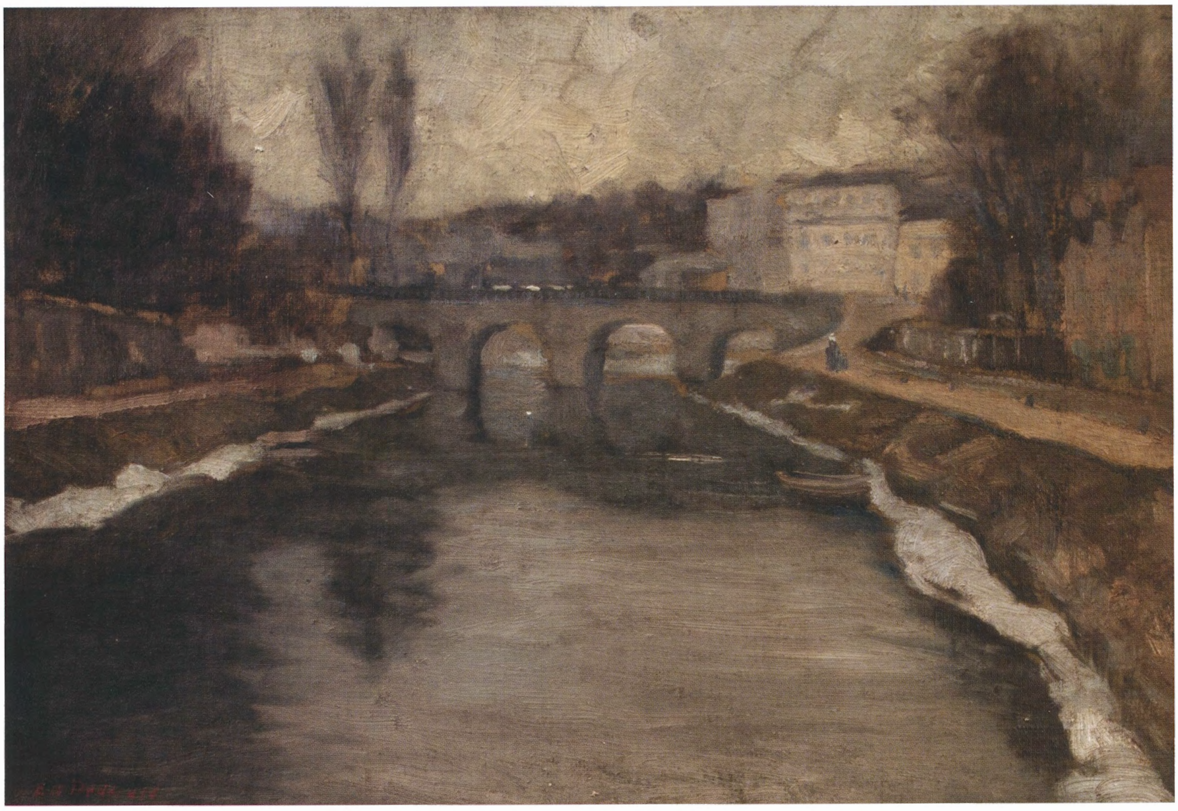


Fig. 8.89. Edward Redfield, *Charenton Bridge over the Marne*, 1900. Oil on canvas, 18 x 26 in. Private collection.

traditional Tonalist scene, such as *Foggy Morning*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.87), combines a Whistlerian sensibility for fog effects with a complex formal structure of fascinating, interlocking shapes floating in hazy space—the work of an artist willing to take chances and push forward in new directions. Snell was a revered teacher both in Philadelphia and New Hope, and later in Gloucester and Boothbay Harbor, Maine. *Ten Pound Island*, circa 1910 (fig. 8.88), again demonstrates Snell's masterful ability to transform traditional subject matter, here a straightforward view of Gloucester Harbor, by flattening his forms, including the white spaces of water-reflected light, and composing them into a felicitous and melodious jigsaw of painterly shapes that read with sensuous pleasure as pure surface abstraction, and yet fully describe a specific place, a harbor and bay pulsing with the soft atmospheric light of high summer.

Edward Redfield, born in 1869, was a full decade younger than Lathrop or Snell; he was a Tonalist from early on and a vigorous Impressionist for the better part of his career. Redfield is certainly the best known and probably the most prolific of the New Hope painters, revered for his bravura paint handling and "manly"—and often huge—Impressionist canvases, many done plein air and in the biting cold of winter. In his early days, in the decade before 1900 and the years soon after, Redfield studied and worked with Robert Henri, and closely followed the career path taken by many in the successor generation born after 1865 who began as Tonalists and later adopted Post-Impressionist styles. Working with Henri in Paris around 1900, Redfield matured under the spell of Whistler, adopting the master's "soup" method of painting, applying a neutral tone to the prepared canvas, thus requiring a minimal amount of paint to be used, while the ground additionally supplied a unifying and harmonizing element. (Henri and Redfield were also powerfully influenced by Tonalist William Gedney Bunce in Venice in 1891.) *Charenton Bridge over the Marne*, 1900 (fig. 8.89), is an accomplished early work of Redfield, combining Whistler's tenebrous tonality with a rugged expressive quality that is Redfield's own. In some respects, the artist's love of dramatic, fictile form, along with a moody and often haunting sensibility was never better served than in his work in Paris, as was the case with Henri. In the Tonalist mode, Redfield could paint both cityscapes and landscapes with equal facility and dramatic power. Upon his return to New Hope, he employed his increasing virtuosity with paint to create some of his most moving and poignant work. *Winter Cedars*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.90), possibly reflects something of the devastating loss Redfield experienced at this time when his two-year-old son was tragically killed by a swinging barn door. Redfield's long ribbons of expressive paint and somber color scheme seem to speak to some inexpressible sadness. And yet the painting reveals the best in Redfield's Tonalist mode, allowing the artist to create complex patterns: the bare, receding patches in the snow, the rhythmic oscillation of the stripped tree trunks tipped with sunset glow, and the hills and sky beyond, which lie flat on the canvas as pure swatches of impasto, blocking the expectation of recession—all hallmarks of Whistlerian formal design, but here energized less by the dynamic imperative of craft and more by deep emotion.

In the first years of the twentieth century, Redfield employed both Tonalist and Impressionist modes as the mood—or requirements of the moment—struck him, but as the years past, he settled on an extravagantly expressionistic Impressionist facture, his canvases fairly seething with bold and brash runnels of pigment, though in his snow scenes at dusk, something of his early Tonalist sensibility is retained. The brash, larger-than-life Redfield, a contrast to the sober and soulful Lathrop, formulated what became the signature, best-selling style of landscape painting in New Hope, and elsewhere, in the decades after 1910, inspiring legions of imitators who adroitly packaged Redfield's mature Impressionist style and nostalgic imagery. Most added little to what Redfield had achieved early and at his best. It may be that the failure of Whistlerian aesthetics, especially in its later manifestation of Expressive Tonalism, to become better established in Philadelphia and Boston art circles around 1900 explains much of New York's ultimate success in spearheading the modernist cause in America.

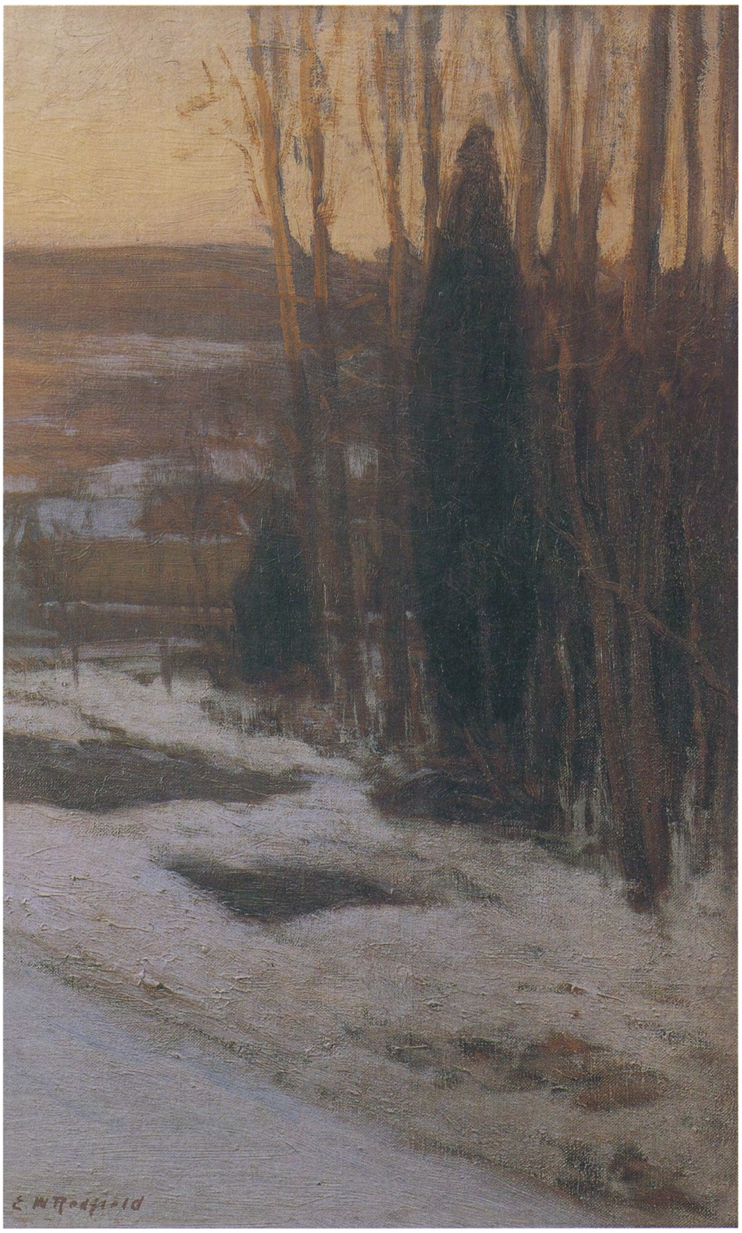


Fig. 8.90. Edward Redfield, *Winter Cedars*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 25 x 16 in. Private collection.

Tonalism in California

Although there were outposts of Tonalism to be found throughout the country by 1900, notably in St. Louis under Edmond Wuerpel, and among the Hoosier Group of painters

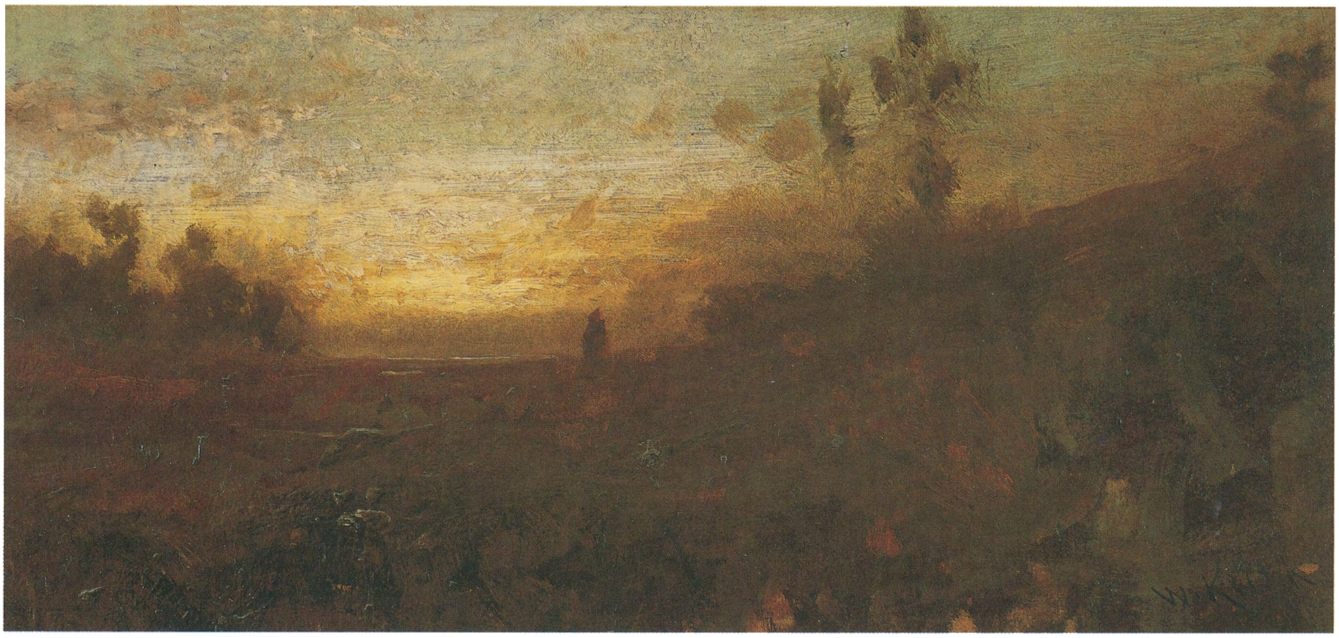


Fig. 8.91. William Keith, *Dusk*, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 11 x 24 in. Private collection.

led by T. C. Steele and John Otis Adams—who tended more toward Impressionism than Tonalism—it was in northern California around Monterey that a distinct offshoot of Tonalism evolved around two major figures: William Keith (1838–1911) and Arthur Mathews (1860–1945). Keith, of the generation of Inness, began as a Hudson River–style landscape painter, producing mostly detailed panoramas of spectacular western scenery. In 1883, Keith traveled to Munich where he was influenced by none other than J. Frank Currier, whose expressive Tonalist style had caused such an uproar on the New York art scene in the late 1870s. Currier's style of freely brushed pigments was evident in Keith's work on his return to San Francisco in 1885. Keith had also long been an admirer of Inness, since at least 1884 when an Inness had been exhibited at the Mechanics' Institute in San Francisco. From 1885 on, Keith's work began focusing on the intimate settings of oak groves and river views, sometimes mimicking Barbizon tropes of watering cattle; his palette darkened and his natural forms gained a poetic fluidity and expressive quality utterly different from his earlier work. In 1891, Keith hosted Inness on a visit to California during which time Inness painted in Keith's studio and visited Yosemite National Park and the Monterey Peninsula. Inness's influence, not to mention Keith's embrace of Swedenborgian doctrines, further solidified the changes in Keith's art, broadening his style and allowing more abstraction and expressive use of pigment to enliven his dreamy settings, as can be seen in *Dusk*, circa 1900 (fig. 8.91). Keith readily acknowledged Inness's influence: "I am learning ever so much from him. I have painted too solidly, laying on heavy material and so my pictures lack color and are black and white. I must paint more thinly and transparently. That makes color and the middle tones."[143]

Along with Inness, Whistler and the growing Tonalist movement influenced many California artists in the last decade of the twentieth century. But the affinity for Tonalism expressed in the work of so many California artists of this period may have had just as much to do with the type of landscape and peculiar microclimate found along the Pacific coast, a point suggested by art historian Harvey Jones in his catalogue of an exhibition at the Oakland Museum in 1995 on California Tonalist painting, which examined the phenomenon from a late-twentieth-century perspective. "In California, where the change in seasons is not so clearly discerned, the landscape along the Pacific coast contributes its own distinctive colors to the Tonalist palette. The faded greens and tawny ochers of the grassy hillsides in late summer, along with the gray-green foliage of eucalyptus, live oak, and olive trees, blend their muted tones with the pearly grays of marine mists and fogs at early morning and late afternoon."[144]

In 1907, a year after the disastrous San Francisco earthquake of 1906 (William Keith lost his studio, 2,000 paintings, and 40 years of work), a group of like-minded artists joined together to form the Del Monte Art Gallery in Monterey to exhibit and promote their work. William Keith, Xavier Martinez (1869–1943), Arthur Mathews, and Charles Rollo Peters (1862–1928), among others, had undergone formative training in Paris in the late 1880s and 1890s, combining technical expertise with exposure to Whistler and Art Nouveau. Moody Whistlerian aestheticism in particular and the enduring gravitational pull of the late synthetic work of Inness—by 1907 a demigod for American painters—did much to shape the sensitivities of these California artists, as did the atmospheric landscape of the Monterey Peninsula, with its distinctive windblown cypresses

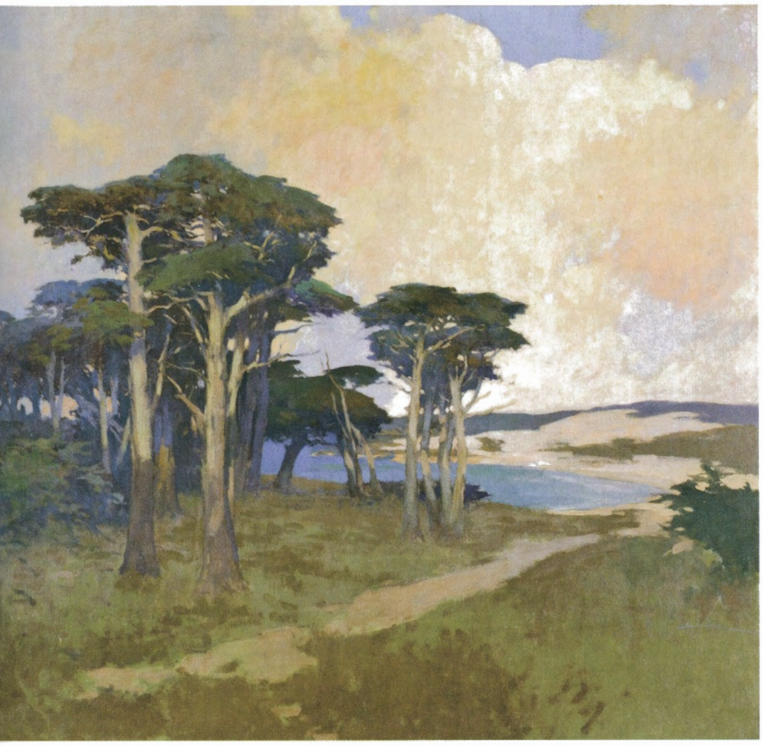


Fig. 8.92. Arthur Mathews, *Monterey Cypress, California*, c. 1930. Oil on linen canvas, 42 x 46 in. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Gift of Nancy Daly.

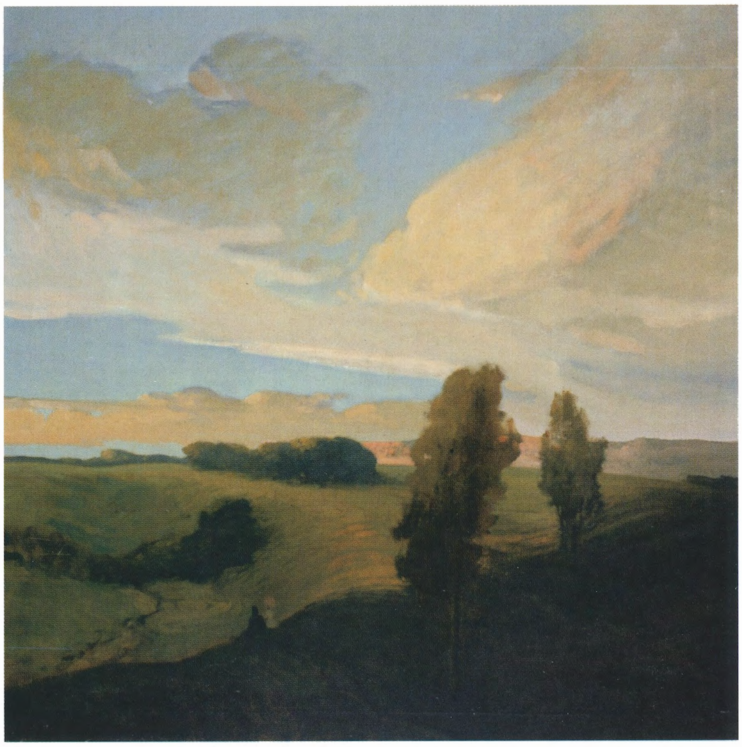


Fig. 8.93. Xavier Tizoc Martinez, *Contra Costa*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 26 x 30 in. Collection of the Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Anonymous Donor.

and soft undulating hills, rocky coastlines and tall pines, and the mists and fogs that characterize the Bay Area and the brown hills of the Carmel Valley. Evocative landscapes and exposure to Expressive Tonalism after 1900, which developed a predisposition for a quasi-Symbolist style of imagery, gave a distinctive flavor to the work of this group of northern Californians, differentiating them from their colleagues down the coast who responded to the southern California light with a focus on plein-air painting and Impressionist-style facture.

Arthur Mathews, born in 1860 and thus a member of the prime generation of Tonalists, took the decorative aspects of Aesthetic Tonalism—the emphasis on line, form, and color patterns—and turned it to his depiction of Monterey cypresses, the dunes and pine groves of the area (*Monterey Cypress*, c. 1930, fig. 8.92), creating expressive designs that flatten the image and bring it close to the picture plane for added dramatic and decorative effect. Mathews's Tonalist style, given its abstract and formal underpinnings, was perfectly suited for the depiction of landscape, and after 1907, the demand for his landscapes far outstripped that for his figurative work. Xavier Tizoc Martinez, a student of Mathews, often included figurative notes in his dreamy landscapes, while his purely figurative works display a hard-won homage to Whistler's portrait style (*Contra Costa*, n.d., fig. 8.93).

Charles Rollo Peters specialized in moonlit nocturnes of the Monterey area and found a market niche for his mysterious evocation of old Spanish missions and adobe houses. Peters had met Whistler in Paris and it was reported that the master had found Peters's nocturnes (for example, *Moonlight Landscape*, n.d. fig. 8.94), on a par with his own. Peters was one of the rare California painters of the period to have a following in New York art circle, where he was exhibited at the Macbeth Gallery, and even had a one-man show at the prestigious Union League Club. His evocative and nostalgic nocturnes of old California, which provided Peters with a handsome income, were a West Coast equivalent of the old rundown homesteads and overgrown pastures so dear to East Coast Tonalist painters.

Fig. 8.94. Charles Rollo Peters, *Moonlight Landscape*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 20 x 24 in. Collection of the Oakland Museum of California. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert M. Stoll Jr.

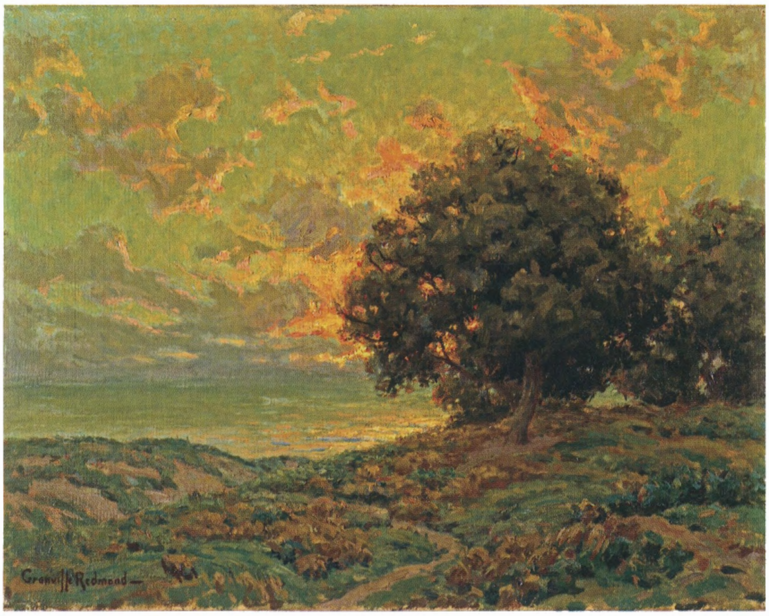


Fig. 8.95. Granville Redmond, *Malibu Sunset*, c. 1920. Oil on canvas, 14 x 18 in. Courtesy Steven Stern Gallery.

Though not part of the original Del Monte Gallery Group, and slightly older than its Paris-trained members, Granville Redmond (1871–1935) produced superb Tonalist visions after his move to Monterey in 1908. Redmond, a pupil of Arthur Mathews, studied in Paris in the 1890s when the influence of Whistler was at its height. The soft vibrant tonalities of his work from the first decade of the century, as in *Malibu Sunset* 1909 (fig. 8.95), are reminiscent of the work of Charles Warren Eaton during the same period. A childhood disease had left Redmond deaf and the introspective style of Tonalism, which he preferred over the brighter Impressionist style he sometimes practiced, may reflect his sensitivities to silent worlds. The dominance of the Tonalist School in the San Francisco Bay Area continued right up to 1915 and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, when San Francisco hosted a huge array of artists from across the international spectrum. Tonalists like Mathews and Keith received prominent billing; Keith had a gallery to himself, as did stars of the American art world, William Merritt Chase, John Henry Twachtman, Childe Hassam, Edmund Tarbell, and Edward Redfield.

Pictorialist Photography and Tonalism

The dominance of Tonalism around the turn of the century and its geographic diffusion throughout the United States also affected and influenced all the other arts, both fine and decorative. The rise of pictorial photography in the 1890s was directly tied to the Tonalist movement. Artistic photographers eager to raise their art to the status of a fine art mimicked the look and style of the best painters of the period, often taking on similar subject matter as that found in the prevailing tradition. In America, the photographer, gallerist, and proselytizer for modernism, Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946), was driven in his formative years to raise pictorial photography to a high art. Stieglitz's birth date of 1864 places him at the end of the prime generation of Tonalists, 1840 to 1865; he epitomizes the career span of many of the artists of his day who matured under the influence of Whistler's low-keyed Tonalism, embracing related forms of low-toned modernism, evocative of the spiritual and the symbolic. Pictorialism, with its emphasis on soft focus and compositions echoing painterly refinement, especially its bucolic subject matter, had its roots in English Aestheticism and French Barbizon painting. When Stieglitz returned to America in the 1890s after his years of studying and working in Europe, he translated this Pictorialist tradition to American subjects, landscapes and city scenes in particular, then returned to Europe to record similarly poetic views of Holland and Venice, all favorites of Tonalist painters of the day. Photography by its very nature is inherently tonal, in its range of black and white and the infinite shades of gray. Stieglitz embraced the monochromatic textures available to photography, emphasizing the technical attributes of the art form, thus stressing "tone rich" and "tonal" values in photography. According to art historian Diane Fischer, "Tonalism offered Stieglitz the ideal mixture of tradition and experimentation he needed to pursue his objective, which he later summarized, was to promote, 'a picture rather than a photograph.'"[145]

Stieglitz, an indefatigable crusader and propagandist, was intent on winning for Pictorialist photography in America a place in museums alongside the work of the major painters of the time. Like all artists in the 1890s and into the first decade of the twentieth century, Stieglitz came under the sway of Whistler and certainly was well aware of the dominant position of Tonalists like Inness, Dewing, and Tryon in the most prestigious art circles of the day. Even in his few paintings, such as *Central Park*, 1902 (fig. 8.96), Stieglitz perfectly mimics the prevailing Tonalist style, employing positive and negative images to create decorative pattern and ambiguous form. Stieglitz, motivated always to progressive ends, extracted from the Tonalist mode precisely those elements that were most advanced and best suited to the technical and artistic resources of the photographic medium: simplicity, subtle tonal variation, contrast of tone, patterning of positive and negative forms, dematerializing form, softening edges, cropping, and unusual angles for dramatic effect; and in terms of emotional impact, he stressed mystery, symbolic form, and fugitive time. A classic Stieglitz photograph of 1893, *Winter—Fifth Avenue* (fig. 8.97), makes use of all these fundamentally Tonalist strategies to obtain a dramatic yet simplified image that has both emotional resonance and visual carrying power. Stieglitz preferred "straight" photography with little or no manipulation or retouching of the final image, but allowed

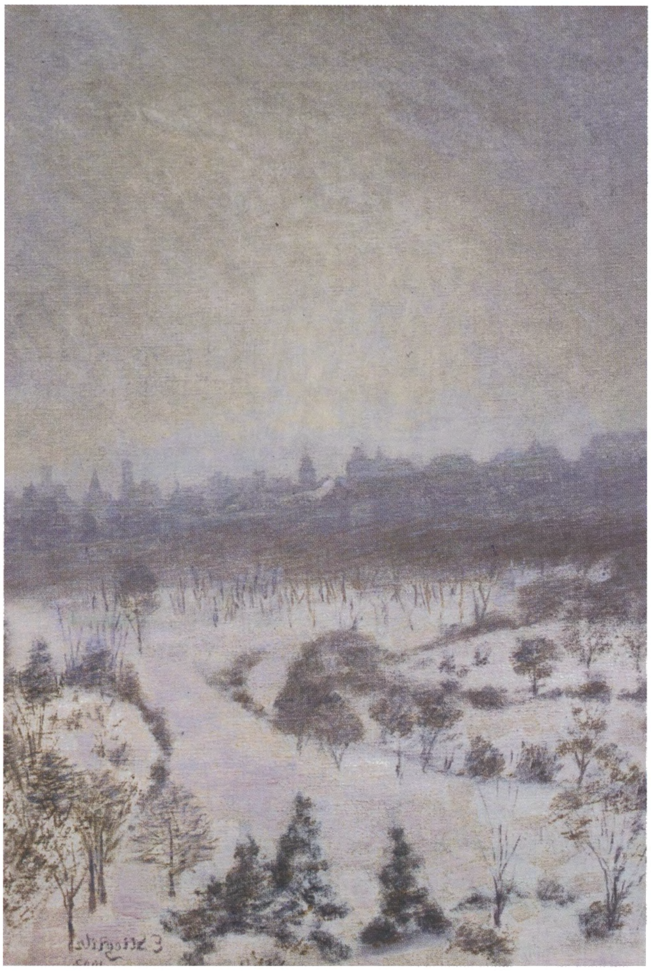


Fig. 8.96. Edward Stieglitz, *Central Park*, 1902. Oil on canvas, 20 x 14 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

his acolytes and colleagues much leeway in such matters. As Stieglitz commented, "The modern photographer has it in his power to direct and mold as he wills virtually every stage of the making of his picture. He can supply, correct, or eliminate; he can even introduce color or such combinations of color by means of successive printings—similar to those resorted to in lithography—as to produce almost any effect that his taste, skill, and knowledge may dictate."[146]

In his campaign to elevate pictorial photography, Stieglitz managed to enlist some of the most talented artists and critics of his day, many steeped in and longtime champions of Tonalism. Edward Steichen, recognized as one of the major photographers of his era, actually began his artistic career as a Tonalist painter and only gradually evolved into a full-time photographer. Early in his development as an artist, he was well aware of the Tonalist tradition in painting, and explained how photography was a useful adjunct to capturing the moods of landscape for his painted subjects. "Although painting offered unlimited opportunities to deviate from the purely naturalistic, I found that I brought to painting some of the discipline of the literal that was inherent in photography. The moonlight subjects appealed to me on a romantic basis, but I made realistic notes of the actual night colors on the spot, describing the colors I saw in terms of the mixture of pigments to be used in the painting."[147] Although Stieglitz was leery of what he called the "artsy" manipulation of prints, something Steichen embraced, he found Steichen an energetic and insightful artist and an ally in raising the reputation of pictorial photography, and later recruiting and suggesting artists for his New York gallery.

Stieglitz turned to two major critical voices of his day, in addition to Steichen: William Caffin and Sadakichi Hartmann, both long in the Tonalist camp, who welcomed Stieglitz's championing of pictorial photography precisely because it furthered and reinforced the underlying artistic strategies of the Tonalists, especially those of the Whistlerian Aesthetic wing of the movement. First in *Camera Notes* (1897–1903) and later in *Camera Work* (1903–17), the influential photographic journals that Stieglitz edited to promote pictorial photography and later modernism across the arts, Caffin and Hartmann's views were featured, substantiating not only the ties between Pictorialism and Tonalism but also extrapolating the value of tone in art as *the* most significant and progressive aspect of the avant-garde—the defining characteristic of modernism. Sadakichi Hartmann wrote in 1909, elucidating the use of tone in both paintings and photography: "Tonal composition consists largely of a right

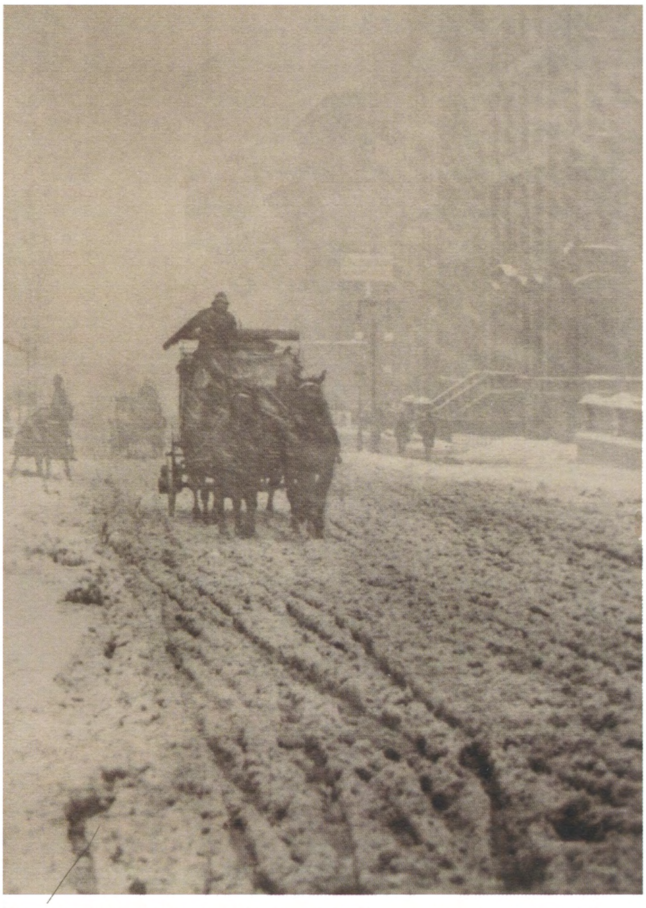


Fig. 8.97. Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter—Fifth Avenue*, 1893. Carbon print, 15 x 11 in., mounted flush on board. Courtesy Daniel Wolf and Pace/MacGill Gallery.

sense of proportion, to understand the beauty of different degrees of tonality, the relation of tone in regard to size and shape against each other, and to bring all these possibilities into full play in each new effect."[148] Hartmann was a champion of Whistler and the American artist and teacher Arthur Wesley Dow, who in turn advocated the Japanese approach to color and design, extrapolating the formal strategies of Tonalism and advocating their implementation across the arts. Hartmann's keynote as a critic was that art should be suggestive and mysterious: the ambiguity and troubling dreamlike quality often found at the heart of the modernist enterprise. As Hartmann wrote: "Mystery seems to consist largely of a concealment of actualities, of depriving the words to a certain extent of their literary significance or of investing them with pictorial and musical qualities."[149]

Charles Caffin had long championed the radical revolution brought about in American art by the Tonalists, documenting the evolution of Tonalism the late 1870s and early 1880s in his influential 1907 *Story of American Painting*, and in subsequent books and reviews in which he touted Tonalism as the progressive mode of the day. Caffin saw Stieglitz's radical championing of pictorial photography and modernism (all wrapped in the American flag—just as de Kay had promoted Tonalism) as entirely congenial to the core precepts of Tonalism espoused by Whistler, especially its allegiance to formal abstraction and the spiritual aspirations inherent in Asian art. Significant form and the subtle use of tonal and color relationships were key to what Caffin perceived to be art's central goal: a kind of universal spirituality. "If painting is to maintain a hold upon the intelligence and imagination, as music does, and possibly poetry, and to grow [sic] forward in touch with the growing needs of humanity, it must find some fundamental motive other than the *appearances* of the world. . . . If it is to keep itself in living competition with the superior impressiveness of modern music . . . it must take on something of quality which is the essence of music—the *abstract*. It is here that it may learn of the Oriental ideal, as exemplified in Japanese art."[150]

Although Stieglitz would later reject, or at least dismiss, much of his early work, and even his enthusiasm for the modernist aesthetic as then embedded in the Tonalist (Whistlerian) tradition, it is clear that Tonalism, both in photography and the fine arts, served as the spiritual wellsprings of his taste in art for the remainder of his long career as a promoter of advanced art in America. Stieglitz's championing of American art—his and his circle's brand of American modernism—after the Armory Show of 1913, was no less fervent than his passionate advocating for pictorial photography in the first decade of the century; in a sense, they were one and the same. Stieglitz, however, equivocated on his past, glossing over his Whistlerian heritage, the better to project himself as a self-created genius. Like Alfred H. Barr, and Stieglitz's patron Duncan Phillips in the 1920s and 1930s, he dispensed with Whistler as a formative influence whose aesthetic ways smacked a little too much of old-style elitism by the 1920s. This, too, was only another example of how the Tonalist heritage dropped out of sight, finessed by the very artists, scholars, and collectors who, for mostly self-serving reasons, tried to cover their tracks. It was no coincidence that in 1902 none other than Charles de Kay invited Stieglitz to show at the National Arts Club, resulting in the first exhibition of the Photo-Secession as a group dedicated to raising photography to the status of a fine art. A *New York Times* review of the exhibition, possibly by de Kay, noted that Stieglitz gave a talk in the galleries, comparing the exhibited photographs with ordinary photographs, which Stieglitz described as "horrible examples," to emphasize his distinction between fine-art photography and amateur work. The reviewer wrote, "The exhibition contains many very beautiful prints which surprise one by their tones, painterlike quality, and picturesqueness."[151]As Pictorialist photography was fundamentally influenced by the Tonalist movement, it may well be that the development of fine-art photography also influenced painters around 1900 to use more monochromatic palettes to enhance the dramatic, symbolic, and formal read of their canvases. Among Stieglitz's circle of painters, photographic reproductions of their work certainly suggested such adaptations in their art.

Tonalism and the Aesthetic Movement

The Aesthetic movement in the decorative arts largely set the stage—certainly the hanging spaces—for Tonalist art starting in the late 1870s. The Philadelphia Centennial Exposition of 1876 did much to bring the Aesthetic movement into vogue, with displays of decorative arts and household items of English design and manufacture. Well into the 1880s and into the last decade of the nineteenth century, the Aesthetic movement flourished, slowly giving way by the turn of the century to the Arts and Crafts movement, a more indigenous style, which brought about a greater simplification and streamlining of household interior design. Originating in England, the Aesthetic movement was based on ideas of natural design and homespun workmanship first broached by the English architect Augustus Pugin (1812–1852). This was then taken up by John Ruskin and his enthusiasm for medieval design and craftsmanship; later, with a dose of poeticizing dreaminess from the likes of Baudelaire and Swinburne, this high-minded doctrine of art for art's sake was further popularized by Oscar Wilde on his visit to American in 1882–83. Wilde's message of aesthetic uplift was subsequently refined and elaborated on by Whistler, not only in his exquisite Nocturnes but also in the use of subtle complementary colors for interior design and his minimalist hanging methodology for picture exhibitions.

In America, the Aesthetic movement was as much about art ideals as it was about prescriptions for good art, good taste, the good life, and appropriate decoration—much of it with a hybrid Anglo-Japanese flavor. It was both a cultural phenomenon and an establishment lifestyle: a way to define good taste and cultural refinement. Doses of aesthetic refinement were regularly served up by the popular press, replete in the pages of *The Century Magazine*, and by writers and art critics like Clarence Cook in his 1878 book on interior design, *The House Beautiful*, with chapters first appearing in *Scribner's Monthly*.[152] Cook's was only one of many such books on interior design in the 1880s and 1890s that provided design tips for the smart and up-and-coming urban middle class. Although Cook demurred in his role as fashion maven, claiming no great genius for steering his readers between undue eccentricity and modified Bohemianism, he opted for simplicity and good taste: "I can only say that, after much tribulation, I have reached a point where simplicity seems to me a good part of beauty, and utility only beauty in a mask; and I have no prouder nor more pretending aim that to suggest how this truth may be expressed in the furniture and decoration of our homes."[153]

The Aesthetic movement's emphasis on design and pleasing patterns influenced and complemented the Tonalist style. Decorative objects often incorporated motifs drawn from nature, especially flowers, plants, birds, and butterflies, into all areas of interior design, employing various innovative strategies of decorative patterning and graphic layout, many directly copied from sources in Japan and China. The naturalism and cult of beauty surrounding the Aesthetic movement was a reaction against the shoddy commercialism of the Industrial Revolution. Beautiful handmade objects of traditional craftsmanship were considered an antidote to mass-produced junk. Bringing lovely objects into the household was an indication, not just of good taste and breeding but also of an uplifting, even spiritualizing dynamic to counter the rampant materialism of the age. For Cook and his generation of cultural critics, who saw their role as enlightening and cultivating the tastes of a young nation, a properly decorated home constituted a retreat from the world into the bosom of family life, and a place where fine art and literature could be contemplated and enjoyed. The Tonalist landscape perfectly fit with such tastes. The cult of high-mindedness came directly out of the Aesthetic movement, couched in Matthew Arnold's urging toward a "spontaneity of consciousness" and "sweetness and light." As has been discussed, Whistler preached against sentimentality and narrative in art, which he thought entirely inappropriate to its spiritual ends; a point perfectly summarized by Oscar Wilde in his famous denial that painting "has any more spiritual message for us than a blue tile from the wall of Damascus or a Hitzen vase. It is a beautifully coloured surface, nothing more, and affects by no suggestion stolen from philosophy, no pathos pilfered from literature, no feeling filched from a poet, but by its own incommunicable artistic essence."[154] This, too, underscored Aesthetic Tonalism's emphasis on landscape as a work of art first and foremost, focusing primarily on beauty of design, subtle pattern, surface refinement, and poetic rendering, rather than a mundane depiction of place or, worse, a picturesque narrative.

In American interior design and decoration, the Aesthetic movement was championed by Louis Comfort Tiffany and John La Farge, both Tonalist artists. They brought to their work in stained glass the same subtle, diffused tonalities of light and asymmetries of Japanese design found in their painting. Tiffany's and La Farge's stained glass literally colored—toned down and tinctured—the interiors of American households with a diffused spiritual lighting, a soft spectral light. Harsh sunlight was at once filtered and animated by a scrim of symbolic forms derived from the organic world. Like a motion picture projected on a screen, the essences of the natural world were projected inward, affecting both the interior character of the domestic setting and the imagination of the dweller within: the experience was mystical and transformational. As noted in chapter 6, in Charles de Kay's descriptions of the home of William T. Evans, the stained-glass windows approximated and complemented the silvery gray Tonalist cast of his collection of paintings. Tiffany's development as an artist was not unlike the experience of other returning expatriate Tonalists from Europe. De Kay, writing about Tiffany's stained glass, suggested that the brightness of American skies, relative to the gray and overcast skies of northern Europe, prompted Tiffany to his innovations. "Coming back to America where the skies and atmosphere, summer and winter, seem to ask for interiors sheltering the eyes from an excess of brilliancy, Tiffany could not but realize that here was a branch of art neglected, or rather badly served, in Europe, which might offer new fields of delightful work to the new world."[155] This spiritualizing dimension of the Aesthetic movement in interior design paralleled the Tonalists' penchant in landscape painting for ethereal and transfiguring light. Something of this taste for subdued interior lighting and hazy shadowy forms—at least in its spiritual aspects—is found much later in Mark Rothko's obsession with the lighting of his floating abstractions, and more specifically in the nondenominational Rothko Chapel, established by John and Dominique de Menil in Houston, which houses a series of Rothko's tonal works under carefully controlled lighting in a spare and silent setting.[156]

For most Tonalist artists, the Aesthetic movement served as a backdrop for their primary focus: easel pictures. Outside of La Farge and Tiffany, Albert Ryder, Thomas Dewing, Dwight Tryon, Hermann Dudley Murphy, and Birge Harrison, only a few other major landscapists participated significantly in decorative work. But all benefited from the reinvigorated interest in the arts brought about by the ethos of the Aesthetic movement, especially in the corollary art of frame making, the most notable being the flattened and simplified frame designs of Whistler. The boom in watercolors and etchings from the 1880s also could be traced to the Aesthetic movement; intimate artworks gained both greater status as fine-art objects and as decorative accessories for the upscale home. Certainly, the ideal of the sanctity of the art object, and the exalted status of the artist—art for art's sake—came out of the Aesthetic movement, which shifted the focus of art away from narrative to issues of technique, execution, surface quality, formalism, decorative patterning, and overall integrity of design, and thence to spiritual rather than material concerns, and ultimately to the importance of individual expression and subjective interpretation. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the Aesthetic period interiors may appear as overstuffed, busy, and Victorian, and having little to do with progressive trends, but out of these cozy, object-filled and book-lined rooms came aspirations for the production and collecting of art that changed and shaped the future of American art. A large part of this future moved in the direction of simplification (true, too, in the Tonalist landscape) and the integration of decoration and function as one. Much of this functionality was latent in the ideals of the Aesthetic movement (Whistler's interiors had a puritanical, almost Shaker-like simplicity), which were fully realized in the subsequent Arts and Crafts movement with its drive for practical solutions in design: forthright, clean lines, and pure, often dramatic statements of form following function.

The early domestic buildings of the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White, from around 1880–87, characterized by wood-framed structures and simple forms based on eighteenth-century New England models—later termed the Shingle Style—also drew on the design precepts of the Aesthetic movement. Like the Aesthetic Tonalism of approximately the same period, which combined European and Whistlerian sophistication with a candor of feeling, McKim, Mead & White developed a neoclassical style of domestic architecture that was both sensuous and quiet spoken. It was restrained and disciplined, eclectic and often quirky in the assemblage of design motifs, drawing upon European sources but integrating them into vernacular settings that evoked New England probity. The Shingle Style, also like Aesthetic Tonalism, anticipated much of the Arts and Crafts movement, but it was left to Frank Lloyd Wright to translate the logic of McKim, Mead & White's understated domestic dwellings into an architecture of streamlined purity—Wright's Prairie Style. This arc in the development of American architecture from simplicity and balance to larger and bolder symbolic form is mirrored in the transition of Aesthetic Tonalism to Expressive Tonalism.

Tonalism and the Arts and Crafts Movement

The Aesthetic movement had provided both a stylistic dynamic as well as a domestic setting and ethos propitious for the flourishing of the Tonalist movement: intimate artworks of Aesthetic Tonalism, especially small oils, watercolors, and etchings, added to the serenity of snug brownstone parlors and bedrooms. In turn, Tonalist artists originated and encouraged many of the design sensibilities as well as the spiritual aspirations that later flowed into and galvanized the Arts and Crafts movement from the 1890s on. The Arts and Crafts Movement was international in scope, encompassing not just the United States but similar movements in England (where William Morris touted handcraftsmanship and gave the movement a strong Socialist bent), France (home of a more sensuous version, Art Nouveau), Germany and Austria (where the Jugendstil movement stressed handcrafted objects based on Germanic mythology), and other schools of progressive design and craft from Italy to Scandinavia. As Aesthetic Tonalism moved to a bolder, more simplified Expressive Tonalism, the somewhat busy, decorative motifs of the Aesthetic movement underwent a similar process of simplification and functional streamlining, expressing flatter and broader patterns, and the decorative rhythms of the landscape—the horizontals with vertical accents that Tonalism had always stressed.

This feeling for the larger rhythms of natural form soon found its way into the building arts. Frank Lloyd Wright was the greatest exponent of a simplified architecture that in form and function was integrated into surrounding nature, allowing a seamless interpenetration of interior and exterior space. For Wright, every aspect of design mattered: from the quality of reflected light off surfaces, revealing the textures and patterns of various woods, to spiritual feelings prompted by designs that revealed an underlying harmony and repose, in which the various rich tones of the furnishings, fabrics, floors, paneling, and ceiling fixtures played an equal part. The physical sensation of a Wright interior, its equipoise and serenity, has an uncanny likeness to the atmospheric envelope and dreamlike stillness found in a Tonalist painting. Much of Wright's work was inspired by Asian examples, as had been true of Tonalism going back to La Farge and Whistler. Such synergies between the fine and decorative arts were at the heart of the Byrdcliffe Arts Colony in Woodstock, where artists Birge Harrison and Hermann Dudley Murphy were involved in the decoration of furniture. Perhaps no artist better epitomizes the dynamic interplay between art and design, between the development of Expressive Tonalism and the Arts and Crafts movement, than the New England native Arthur Wesley Dow (Hermann Dudley Murphy and Dow became longtime friends and Murphy a proselytizer of Dow's art theories). Dow in practice and spirit presided over an era—unlike any era before or since—in which the fine and decorative arts benefited from an extraordinary cross fertilization.

Arthur Wesley Dow, 1857–1922

Arthur Wesley Dow (fig. 8.98), born in Ipswich, Massachusetts, became the greatest and most influential art teacher and sage for members of the post-1865 generation of modernists, including Georgia O'Keeffe. This, in addition to his writings and influence on the Arts and Crafts movement, until recently has tended to obscure his extraordinary gifts an artist. Dow epitomizes the deep Transcendentalist roots of the New England wing of the Tonalist movement. The area around Ipswich, with its hazy marshes, hayfields, and sinuous rivers, informed his landscape imagery throughout his career. As a young man, like so many of this generation, Dow was a voracious reader. From Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, and Poe he derived a notion that nature contained a spiritual essence, which the artist and poet seeks to express, not by conventional representation but by delving into the essences of the experience; the poetic vision so conceived allows the force of the individual to shine forth. This subjective force of personality, encompassing the central mystery of the creative imagination, became central to Dow's art and teaching.

Like so many New Englanders before him, Dow was drawn to the artistic heritage of William Morris Hunt, especially the way he portrayed landscape in its essentials of form, color, and tone. In effect, Dow, like Henri in his book *Art Spirit*, reformulated Hunt's *Art Talks* and reduced it to a set of clear artistic principles in his enormously influential teaching guide of 1899, *Composition*. Dow's early exposure to Japanese art—the prints of Hokusai captivated him—and later the inspiration of his friend and colleague Ernest Fenollosa, curator of Japanese art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and perhaps the greatest authority on Asian art in America at the time, reinforced Dow's notions about abstraction and design. This, too, remained key to his teaching methods. Dow, in an 1891 letter to his wife, noted the revelation that changed his life—the same impulse that had sparked the Tonalist movement decades before: "It is now plain to me that Whistler and Pennell, whom I have admired as great originals, are only copying the Japanese. One evening with Hokusai gave me more light on composition and decorative effect than years of studying pictures. I surely ought to compose in an entirely different manner and paint better."[157]

Dow's experience in the 1880s studying in France was formative but hardly decisive in his later life. The Académie Julian proved useful to the scholarly Dow and he worked hard to refine his drawing skills, but the academic atmosphere and high life of Paris had little appeal. Instead, it was the pearly gray skies and lush landscapes of Brittany, not unlike his home ground of Ipswich, that ultimately drew Dow away from Paris. The experience of Brittany and, crucially, the teaching and example of the marine Tonalist, Alexander Harrison, who kept a studio in Concarneau, only deepened Dow's emotional ties to landscape. Dow admired Harrison for his dedication to landscape, his originality—Harrison was neither academic nor a purveyor of fashionable Impressionism—and his ability to evoke the fugitive effects of light and color reflected off twilit waves. Harrison's dematerializing scenes of buoyant light and serene harmonies, infused with delicate patterns and sensuous design, appealed directly to Dow's innate love of structure and symbol found in natural phenomena. Like many Americans, Dow was drawn to cloudy days that enhanced the subtle tonal effects prized by his generation. Dow's *Study for a Field, Kerlaouen*, 1885 (fig. 8.99), painted in Brittany and accepted into the Salon of 1877, shows the influence of Harrison's minute attention to varied tones under subdued light, and Jules Bastien-Lepage's use of a high horizon to dramatize the foreground elements. The compositional form pushes the vibrant play of greens to the picture plane where they dazzle the viewer with their hypnotic energy. Other works by Dow were accepted at the Paris Exposition Universelle of 1900. Alexander Harrison, Charles Harold Davis, and John Singer Sargent all praised Dow as one of the finest painters of landscape in America.

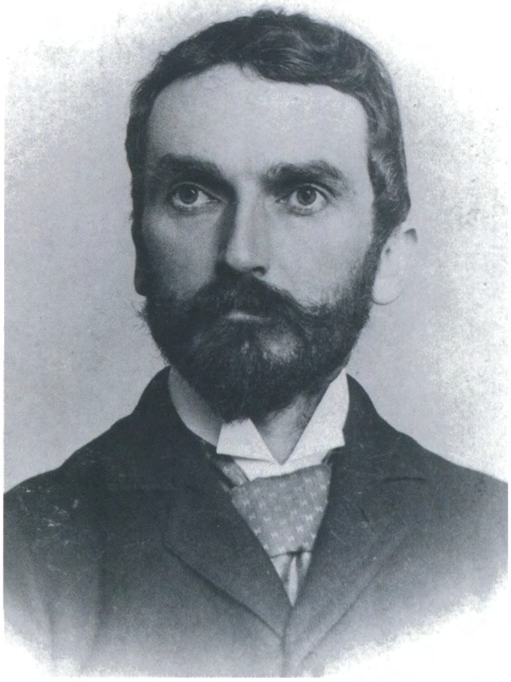


Fig. 8.98. Arthur Wesley Dow, undated photograph. Courtesy Ipswich Historical Society, Massachusetts.

When he returned to America in 1889, Dow, like numerous expatriates before him, translated the somber tonalities of seagirt Brittany to the marshes around his Ipswich home,

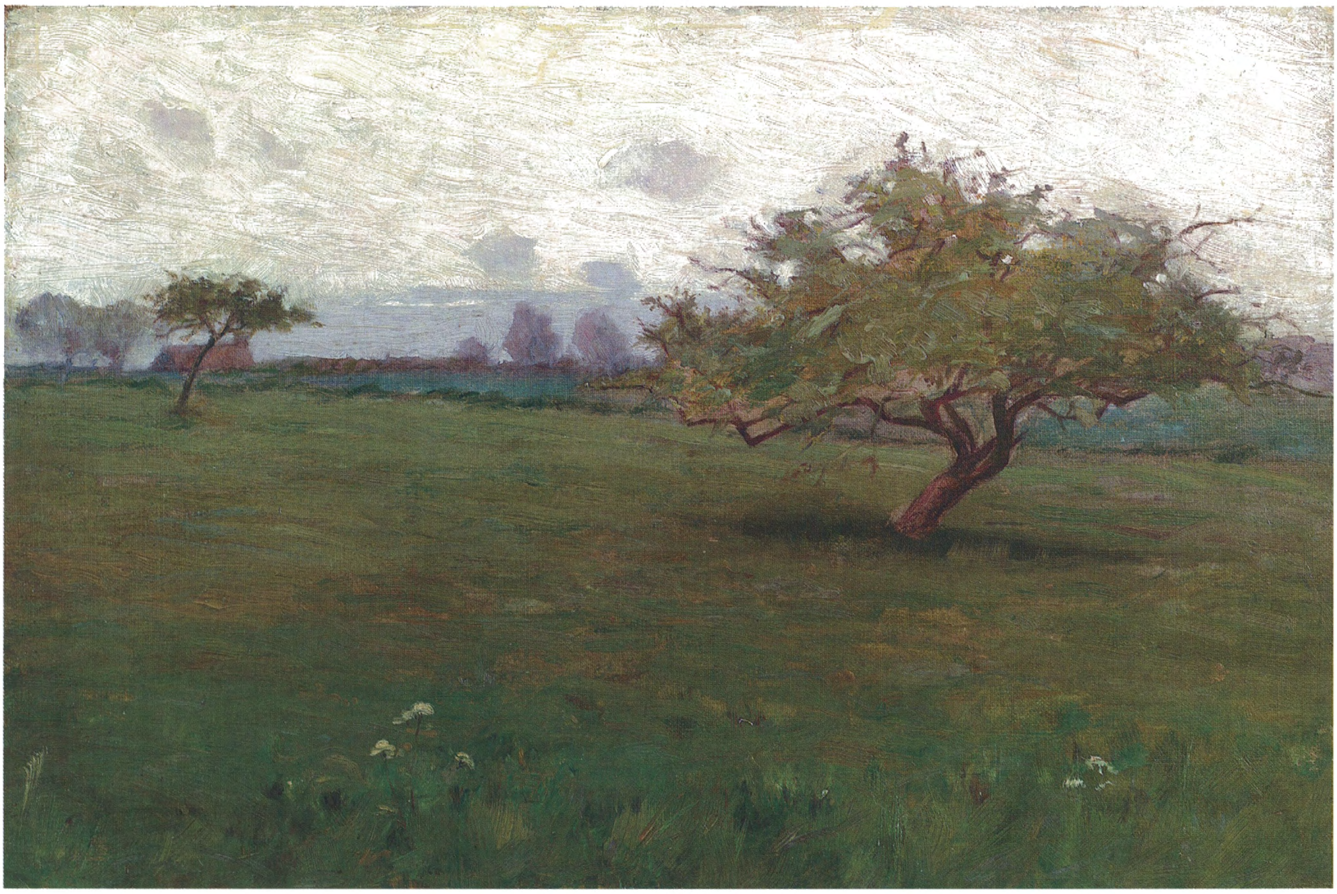


Fig. 8.99. Arthur Wesley Dow, *Study for a Field, Kerlaouen*, 1885. Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

painting richly sensuous landscapes full of lush greens and yellows and ropy, riverine forms. *The Blue Dragon (The Marshes)*, 1892 (fig. 8.100), shows the translation of Dow's Brittany-inspired feel for landscape to his home setting near Ipswich. His palette has lightened to accommodate the brighter light of America, while his penchant for tonality has been informed by larger and bolder contiguous brushstrokes, in turn establishing an interwoven tapestry of micropatterns of paint marks on the canvas. Bastien-Lepage's high horizon line has been transformed by the flattened and decorative influence of Japanese prints, which Dow had discovered and begun exploiting by this time. The compositional affinity with La Farge's *Paradise Valley* (see fig. 1.19), may be purely coincidental, but hardly surprising given the two artists' shared proclivities. As Hunt and La Farge had been entranced by the misty environs of Newport, so Dow found the foggy coastlines and inlets, and later the spare coastal sprawl of Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, conducive to his Tonalist renderings.

Like many artists the economically troubled 1890s, Dow was compelled to teach for a living. In 1891, he opened his Ipswich Summer School of Art, which soon attracted students from all over New England. Reflecting his humble origins, Dow retained a strong democratic streak in his artistic philosophy. Throughout his life, he remained dedicated to the proposition that art was essential to humanity, and therefore should not be limited to the appreciation of fine arts but invigorate the decorative arts, too—a counterforce, as Dow saw it, to the dead hand of industrial mass production. This Transcendentalist-influenced high-mindedness and commitment to teaching the fundamentals of beautiful design, and so empower nature's spiritual mysteries, became a kind of artistic religion that inspired legions of Dow's followers. By example and word, his ideas touched creative endeavors across the country.

What differentiated Dow from so many of his colleagues was his adoption of Eastern-influenced methods of instruction, in which the spirit of design was paramount and which avoided the stultifying tenets of traditional academic training as he had experienced it in Paris. Like Whistler, La Farge, and Hunt before him, Dow found compositional and decorative strategies in Japanese art and the art of the woodcut in particular: "Japanese art is the expression of people's devotion to the beautiful. It is an art which exists for beauty only, in lofty isolation from science and mechanics, from realism and commercialism, from all that has befogged and debased other art."[158] Such a feeling for nature, for a Zen-like rapture, and Dow's anti-commercial stance represented a modernist updating of Thoreau, a writer to whom Dow was drawn. Dow's unique status as a teacher also had much to do with his dedication to a broad spectrum of arts. The

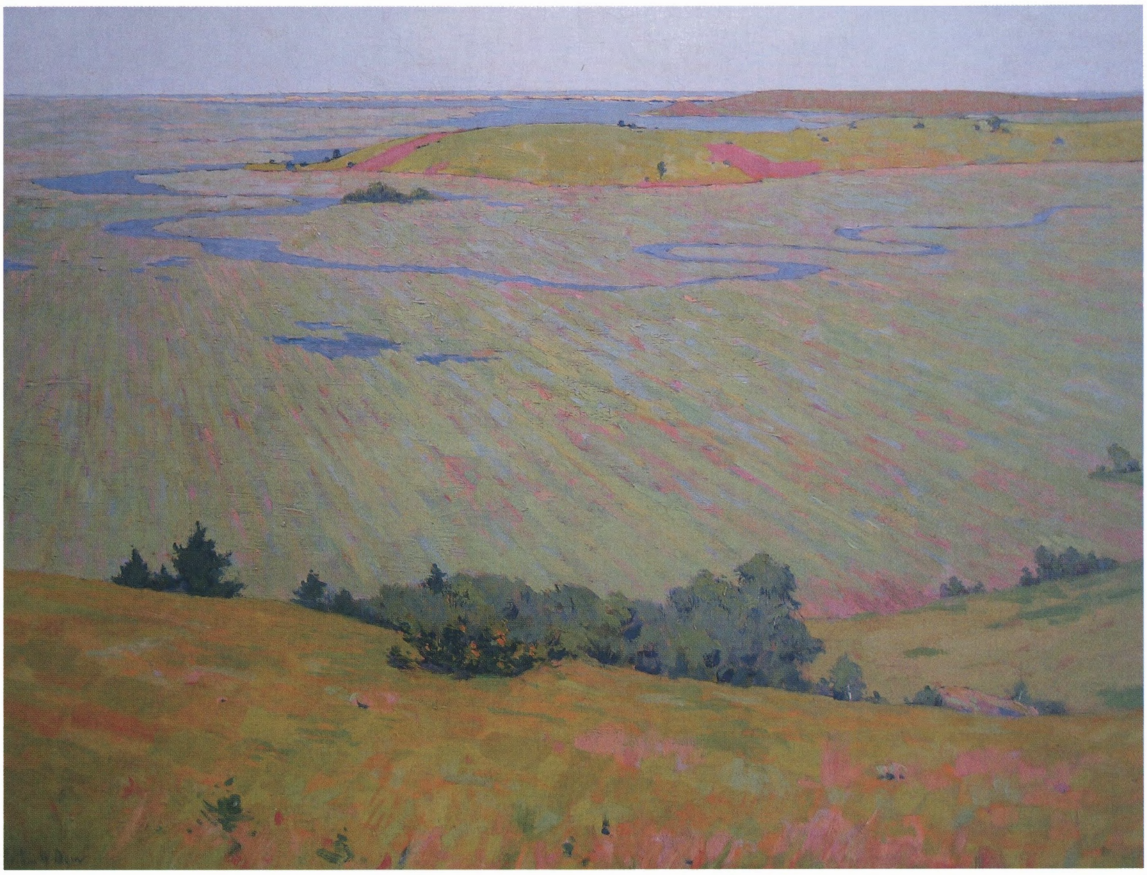


Fig. 8.100. Arthur Wesley Dow, *The Blue Dragon (The Marshes)*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 26 x 30 in. Ipswich Historical Society, Massachusetts.

wide range of course offerings at his school included instruction in printmaking, photography, and the various craft disciplines.

Dow's infatuation with the Japanese woodblock artists Hokusai and Hiroshige inspired him to take up printmaking in the traditional ukiyo-e manner. The woodcut *Rain in May*, circa 1907 (fig. 8.101), is a wonderful amalgamation of the Tonalist aesthetic and Japanese principles of design; here, Dow even emphasizes the patterns of the wood grain in the printing process, an effect picked up on by Arts and Crafts furniture makers who integrated handsome displays of wood grains into the overall simplified designs of their products. Creating these stark woodblock prints with their broad flattened forms, sensuous contours, and subtle tones, Dow was, in effect, reverse-engineering the Tonalist tradition in which he had been nurtured, extrapolating from his mentors, Whistler and La Farge, and their original sources in Asian art and design of more than thirty years before. Dow wrote of the poetic experience he derived from the Japanese masters, which he found much akin to music: [W]e should get from the drawn lines, and the elusive suggested tones, the same kind of appreciation that music gives."[159] In his woodblock prints, Dow often relied on colored papers for unifying his composition; the grain of the woodblock and the texture of the paper became integral to the visual effect he sought. This surface quality, displaying the technical finesse of the artist, had long been integral to the Tonalist methodology. Thus Dow, perhaps more than any artist in his generation, took Tonalism's existing tradition—by always emphasizing the underlying abstract symbolism of the object—to its logical end. He demonstrated in his art and teaching the modernist reverence for flat surface design, decorative spatial organization, the distribution of light and dark masses, and modernism's focus on the essentials—line, form, and color, the crucial elements of good design and the expressive essence of the artistic spirit.

Dow's genius for graphic design did not diminish his abiding faith that the greatest art is an expression of the spiritual forces inherent in nature. A late work, *Moonrise*, 1916 (fig. 8.102), is another example of the way in which Dow further illuminated the Tonalist and Transcendentalist traditions through his understanding of Eastern art, again very much in tune with Emerson and Thoreau's borrowings from Eastern philosophy in their writings. Also like Thoreau, Dow took copious notes on the effects of moonlight in his notebooks for later use in his artwork. All that had been latent and implicit in Tonalism, he made explicit, and thus usable in a wide range of decorative arts.

Although Dow was an early exhibitor at the Macbeth Gallery, along with a roster of important fellow Tonalists, and later at the Montross Gallery and at the Society of American

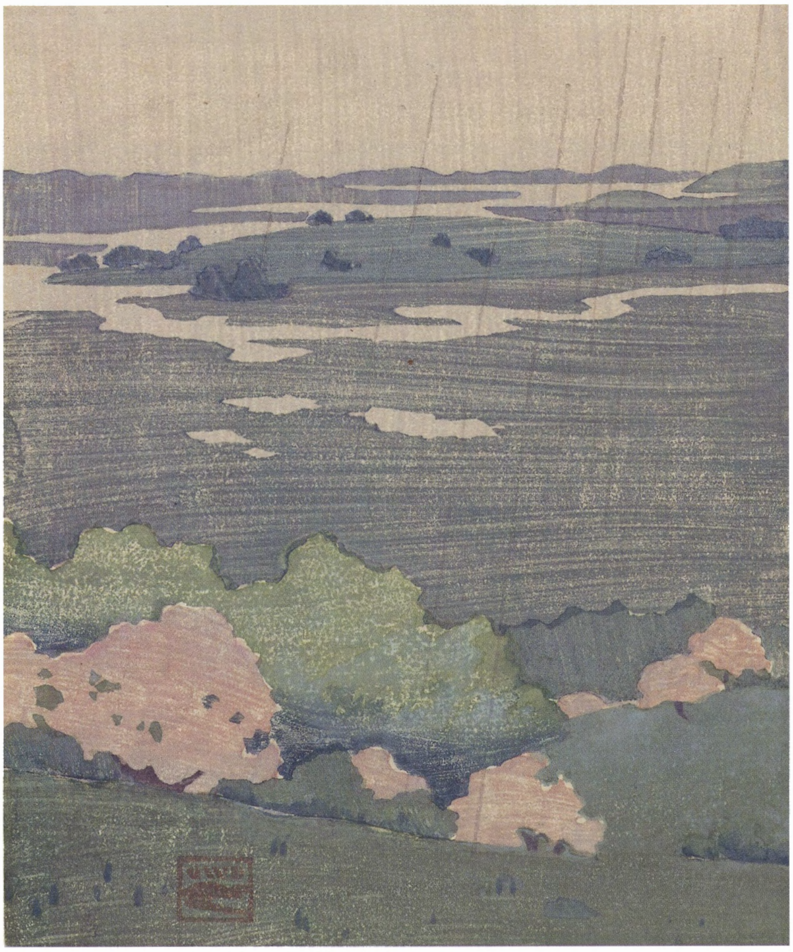


Fig. 8.101. Arthur Wesley Dow, *Rain in May*, c. 1907. Color woodcut, 6⅛ x 4⅞ in. Courtesy Craig F. Starr Gallery, New York.

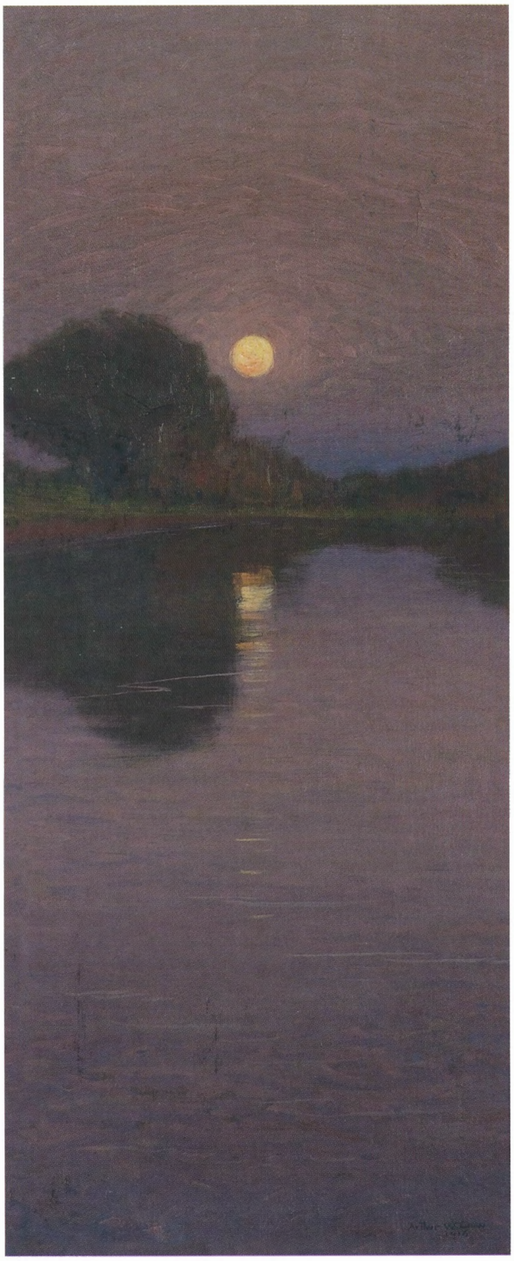


Fig. 8.102. Arthur Wesley Dow, *Moonrise*, 1916. Oil on canvas, 24 ¼ x 10 in. Ipswich Historical Society, Massachusetts.

Artists, his achievements as an artist were overshadowed by his extraordinary accomplishments as a teacher, first in Ipswich, Massachusetts, and later in New York City, at the Pratt Institute, the Art Students League, and Columbia University's Teachers College. Many of Dow's students at Pratt went on to careers as artists, photographers, furniture designers, architects, and most of all, teachers; in turn, his students spread his design gospel to newly opened art schools across the country. Above all, it was Dow's textbook for art students, *Composition*, published in 1899 and still in use by art students today, which disseminated his analytical theories and synthetic process of composition, influencing countless artists and craftsmen. The text of *Composition* makes clear Dow's allegiance to the Arts and Crafts tradition in England and subsequently in America, which in turn stressed Emerson's idea of self-reliance and handworkmanship, a doctrine that portrayed industrial culture and mass-produced items as antithetical to human nature.[160] For Dow, technical issues were only a means to a spiritual end, as attested to by one of his most important students, Georgia O'Keeffe. "This man had one dominating idea: to fill a space in a beautiful way—and that interested me. After all, everyone has to do just this—make choices—in his daily life, even when only buying a cup and a saucer. By this time I had a technique for handling oil and water color easily; Dow gave me something to do with it."[161] Dow's mystical bent, his feeling for the spiritual, for the visual music of nature—deeply rooted in the tradition of Emerson and Thoreau—energized Expressive Tonalism after 1900. Paradoxically, Dow's far-reaching influence as a teacher and his translation of the Tonalist style into principles of good design did much to disguise its origins and long history going back to Whistler in the late 1870s. Dow, too, like Alfred Stieglitz, and later Alfred Barr and Duncan Phillips in their scholarship and collecting, may have been somewhat coy in acknowledging the Whistlerian roots of the design revolution he galvanized. Once Dow, like Frank Lloyd Wright, had recognized Asian art as the source of his inspiration, the Tonalist tradition, which shared those same roots, seemed less important and so less visible, and (certainly in Wright's case) the idea of his accomplishments as sui generis that much more compelling.

In the 1890s, as the American Arts and Crafts movement was gaining momentum, Dow's concepts fed into handcrafted furniture, textiles, ceramics, and interior design. The naturalistic ornament and high-relief patterns that had characterized Victorian or Aesthetic movement decorative arts were simplified and streamlined under Dow's emphasis on flattened and pure line and clear spatial relationships. Sobriety and restraint became the byword of the Arts and Crafts movement. The Mission-style furniture of Gustav Stickley and the Prairie School furniture designed by Frank Lloyd Wright all followed from Dow's principles, especially his emphasis on proportion, balance, repetition, and the play of open and closed spaces, while highlighting the physical characteristics of the materials used. By 1903, Dow's students were involved in furniture design at Woodstock's Byrdcliffe Art Colony. The Carrig-Rohane frame-making company under Hermann Dudley Murphy and Charles Prendergast adopted many of Dow's precepts, producing a hugely influential line of Arts and Crafts frames. Pottery and ceramic workshops across the country were filled with Dow's students who employed his design principles in their wares. Dow was embraced by Pictorialist photographers, especially his belief that the distinctions between the fine and decorative arts should be abolished, thus doing much to raise the status of photography. He wrote reviews for Stieglitz's *Camera Notes*, praising the photographs of his student Gertrude Käsebier, and later hired Clarence White to teach photography at Columbia University in 1907 when artistic photography was still struggling to find its place as a serious art form. Dow's teaching and influence reached across the spectrum of the arts; he provided a template for good design, which included attention to both the subtle and sensual aspects of craft and a firm faith that the spiritual element inherent in art offered uplift for the maker and consumer alike.

Emil Carlsen, 1853–1932

Like Dow, Tonalist Emil Carlsen was an extraordinary, multi-faceted artist with a superb innate sense of design. He was a master of landscape, still life, marine scenes, and portraiture. It is hard to think of another artist, besides William Merritt Chase, who could produce such a high level of work in all genres. In addition, among the major Tonalists, Carlsen is the only artist of foreign birth, arriving in America at a mature age—Carlsen was eighteen when he left Denmark for Chicago in 1872—and merging his Danish artistic training and sensibilities into a fundamentally American idiom by the late 1890s. Carlsen's cool lyrical sense of design and a deep sensitivity for form encompassed in atmospheric light, as well as his superb technical finesse in drawing, ethereal surface qualities, and knack for the decorative, resulted in an art that was at once classic and modern, so much so that his late work of the second decade of the twentieth century and the 1920s could hold its own even in the eyes of the most avant-garde artists and critics of the day. His art epitomizes the way in which the underlying abstract fundamentals of Tonalism incubated a modernist outlook. Carlson took Whistlerian formalism, as embodied in his friend John Henry Twachtman's work of the late 1880s and 1890s, and pushed it to a lyrical and quietist resolution; in his refinement, simplicity, and harmonious tonal structure, he anticipated, if not influenced, the Color Field painting of Milton Avery.

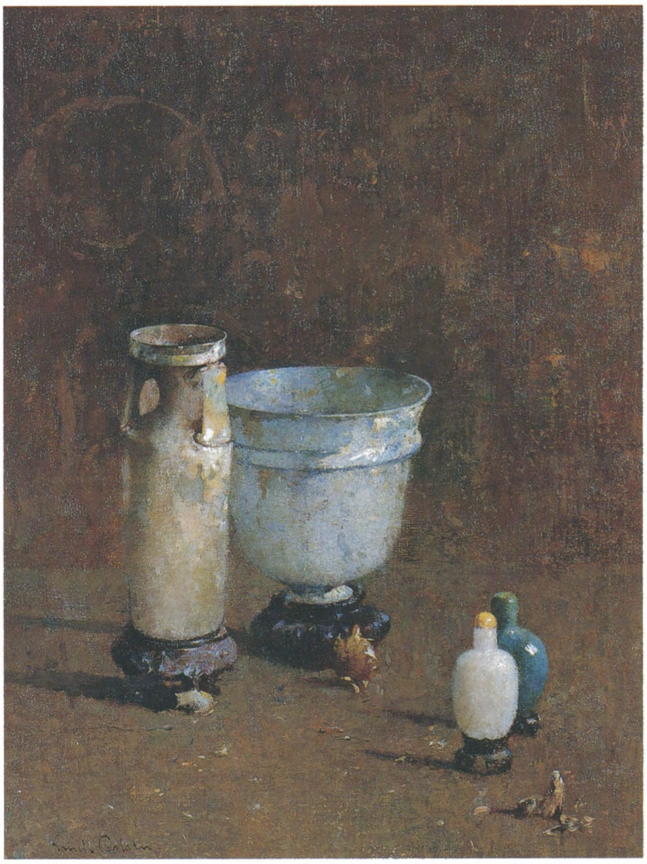


Fig. 8.103. Emil Carlsen, *Jade & Ancient Glass*, c. 1910. Oil on canvas, 20 x 16 in. Courtesy Garzoli Gallery.

Carlsen's itinerant life—the artist moved to Chicago in 1872 and finally settled for good in New York in 1891—meant that he missed out on much of the innovative churnings of the New York art world of the 1880s. What he gained in stints abroad in Denmark and Paris, teaching in San Francisco, and painting commercial works on demand, mostly still lifes (many featuring yellow roses) and marines, was a wide exposure to international and American genres, growing refinement as a draftsman, and a classical feeling for proportion and design—especially the poetic equilibrium found in Jean-Baptist-Siméon Chardin—that was as much spiritual as it was a triumph of craft. *Jade & Ancient Glass*, circa 1910 (fig. 8.103), epitomizes Carsen's still life painting, combining a hyperrealism with an uncanny spiritual grace. No one among the Tonalists, except possibly Whistler, so merged a decorative sensibility with a mystical subjectivity. By the time of his final move to New York, Carlsen was thoroughly prepared to absorb the prevailing developments in the Tonalist landscape that had been brewing up from Inness, Whistler, and the members of the Society of American Artists.

Carlsen's close friendships with J. Francis Murphy, going back to Chicago in the 1870s, as well as John Henry Twachtman and J. Alden Weir clearly played a role in developing the artist's simplified and evocative landscape style, as did the growing market for Tonalist landscapes. Broadly speaking, Carlsen adopted the style of Aesthetic Tonalism, developed in the 1880s, and continued to exploit and expand on its possibilities through the end of his career, generally avoiding the Expressive Tonalism that became current among many Americans after 1900. Both his palette and facture remained cool and understated. What he lacked in emotional power—or rather, avoided in terms of bravura and flashy expression—he made up for in a whispered reticence expressed in the arrested motion of fluid form. *Early Moon Rise*, circa 1919, (fig. 8.104) exemplifies the way in which, in his finest work, the process of metamorphosis is freeze-framed and reality dissected and rearranged to display its abstract and decorative essentials. Carlsen is a master of stopped time. *Early Moon Rise* displays the artist's mastery of design in the depiction of meticulously arranged, expressive tree forms in a stark landscape of meadow and moonlit sky; here, the manipulation of paint textures and tones on the canvas surface adds another dimension to the strong graphic read of verticals and horizontals. Carlsen took infinite pains with his surface textures, scraping down his paint layers and rebuilding them until he had perfectly matched surface structure with the depicted image, until means and ends merged into a seamless whole. This conceptualist impulse is reminiscent of the carefully composed supports J. Francis Murphy employed in his late work. One is reminded, too, of the artist's close friend J. Alden Weir, who hung Carlsen's prepared canvases on the wall—untouched, sighing, "Old Carlsen, they were too beautiful."[162]

Carlsen was embraced by the Society of American Artists in 1902, winning the Webb Prize for landscape in 1905, the Inness Medal at the National Academy of Design in 1907, and a string of prizes right through the 1920s. His Tonalist landscapes and seascapes first tapped into the fervor for Whistlerian ethereality and tone, while his dexterous designs and rhythmic patterns complemented developments in the decorative arts, especially the Arts and Crafts movement, even anticipating aspects of Art Deco. But it was the cool spirituality that captured the hearts of collectors. Carlsen's woodland interiors, like *A Clearing Beyond the Trees (Connecticut)*, 1928 (fig. 8.105), in which the artist pared down his trees to simplified schematic forms hovering amid ambiguous backdrops of earth and sky, full of strange dappled and patterned light, and uncertain spatial relationships had a profound appeal to the Transcendentalist sensibilities of his admirers, as noted by his dealer, Newlin Price, in 1922. "No one was a better draughtsman with the power to see the thing as it really was, and lay its spirit in color before you in his own peculiarly emphasized manner, with a refinement that surprised you by its simplicity. The almost nameless colors of Carlsen's wood interiors mean to some a curious harmony of an indefinite solitude. The dim light that filters through his woodland corridors, which are so like cathedral spaces, makes you feel a presence there and brings you to acquaintance with a forest folk whom you have never met, nor had time to know."[163] Although the artist was never interested in Impressionism as a technical resource, the feel of bright light intensified in Carlsen's work over the years, as the writer and artist Eliot Clark observed in 1919: "Thus we note a change from the low tone and stronger contrasts of his early pictures, to the higher key and more limited range of values of his later work."[164] *Afternoon Landscape*, circa 1915 (fig. 8.106), demonstrates the way in which Carlsen, working in a higher key, still maintained a feeling for cool shapes and an overall expressive lyricism—what Clark described as "the serenity of nature that is interpreted rather than its more dramatic and destructive manifestation. . . . He adapts nature to his own use, and his use is largely decorative. A tree becomes the subject of a separate theme, sometimes seen in colors of autumn, but more often in delicate hues of varying gray-greens and silver; but in whatever scheme of color, the hues are closely related. Always we feel a certain dignity,

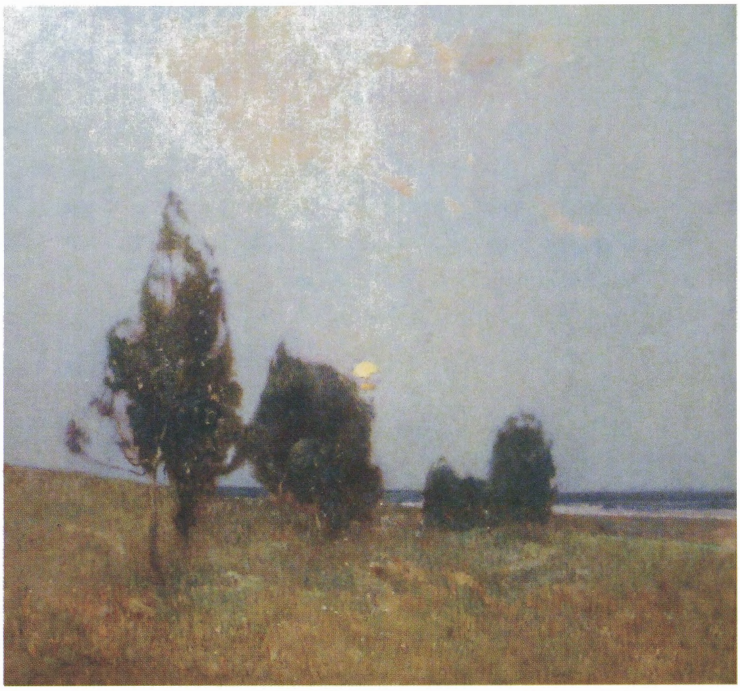


Fig. 8.104. Emil Carlsen, *Early Moon Rise*, c. 1919. Oil on canvas, 24 x 26 in. Courtesy Owen-Yost Collection, New York.

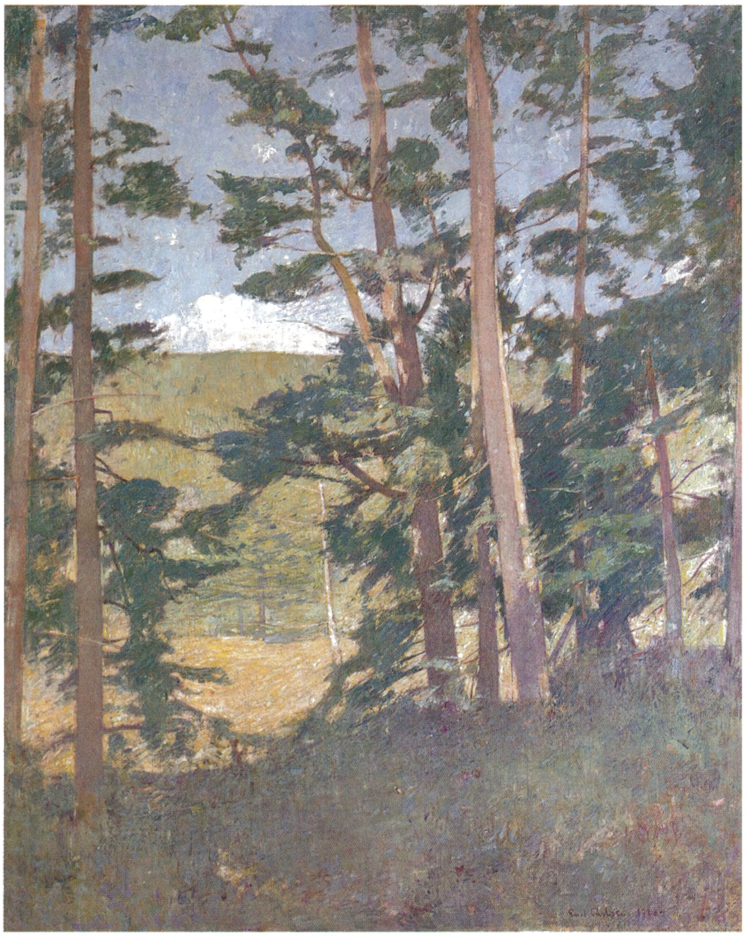


Fig. 8.105. Emil Carlsen, *A Clearing Beyond the Trees (Connecticut)*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

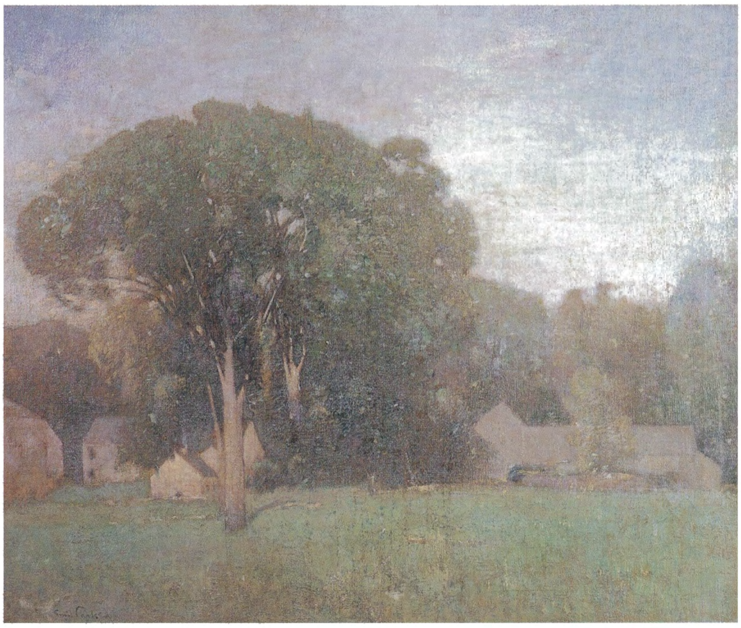


Fig. 8.106. Emil Carlsen, *Afternoon Landscape*, c. 1915. Oil on board, 24 x 29 in. Courtesy Thomas Colville Fine Art, LLC.

obtained by a carefully calculated pictorial balance, the result of the poise of the artist's soul! The tree becomes separated from the other trees just as each soul is a separate entity; yet we inevitably feel its relation to the universal, the soul seeking its assimilation in the One. The spirit of aspiration is in everything that Carlsen does, the endeavor to attain a perfection which is the result of love as manifested in form. . . . Thus lines of rest appeal to him more than lines of action, lines symbolical of heavenward reaching, of quiet and repose."[165]

Such quasi-mystical effusions offer as much insight into the fin-de-siècle spiritual orientation of Carlsen's admirers as they do the nature of the artist's work. In 1919, with the recent end of World War I and European modernism being celebrated in the American art world, old Tonalist masters like Carlsen, who continued to paint better and better with age, soldiered on, the last of their breed to hold aloft the tattered banner of Aesthetic Tonalism and its quietist vision. This was something Clark readily acknowledged: "In contrast to the restless activity of his time, of materialistic competition and ceaseless turmoil, the art of Emil Carlsen is serene and tranquil."[166] In his early writing, the art writer and modernist collector Duncan Phillips responded adoringly to Carlsen's rarefied classicism, precisely because it invoked enduring values of craftsmanship and beauty, even as European modernism threatened to overturn those same "sane" American values. "I know that that Carlsen's only philosophic intention is to paint beautiful, pleasurable pictures. And yet it always seems to me that he is trying to find a formal symbolical expression for the thought that nature exerts at times an influence curiously hypnotic. It seems to me that the prevailing quality of Emil Carlsen's view of nature is a sort of passive Chinese ecstasy, the spirit of the ancient Sung landscapes. In his dream world there is no conception of passion, no revolt, no vain questioning. With calm acquiescence in nature monotony is recognized and cherished. . . . "[167]

Phillips points out that "[w]hat Carlsen reveals to us is the lyric aspect of a certain type of sea to a certain type of mind when it is in a certain trance-like mood."[168] *Breaking Wave*, 1922 (fig. 8.107), exemplifies Carlsen's longstanding love of marine painting, not so much for the rough-and-tumble movement of the sea that preoccupied his contemporaries Homer and marine painter Frederick Judd Waugh, but for its delicate and timeless armature and, in the words of Duncan Phillips, the "hypnotic" and "trance-like" moods the embedded patterns of wave motion prompt in the viewer. Carlsen's seascapes are a world apart from those of the great Tonalist marine painter Alexander Harrison, whose tranquil depictions of prismatic light and calm twilit seas Carlsen would have known well. Carlsen transforms the rough, windswept sea into an aesthetic object, teasing out with infinite attention to detail the pattern structure of nature's metamorphic energies. There is even something of Cézanne's and Picasso's analytic eye in Carlsen's relentless breaking down of form into its constituent elements, in his almost Cubist verification of visual color planes from a multiplicity of angles. The textures and paint surfaces do not

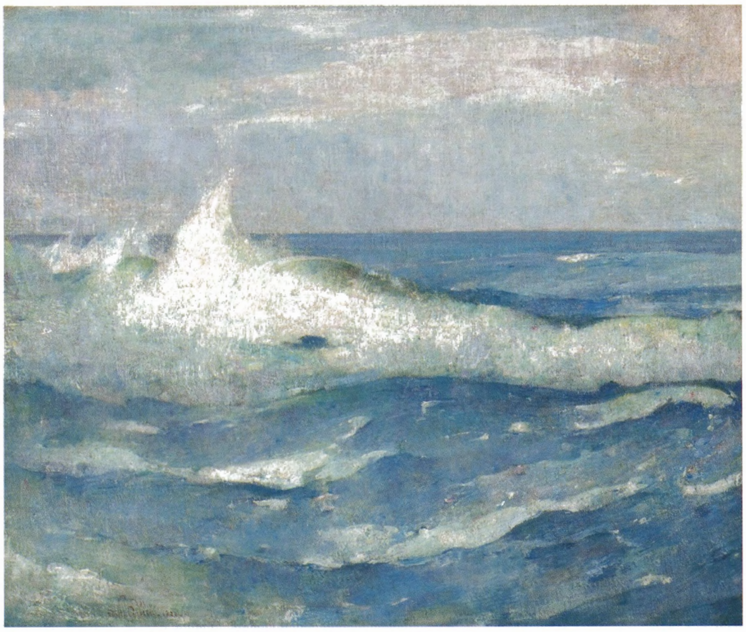


Fig. 8.107. Emil Carlsen, *Breaking Wave*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in. Courtesy MME Fine Art.

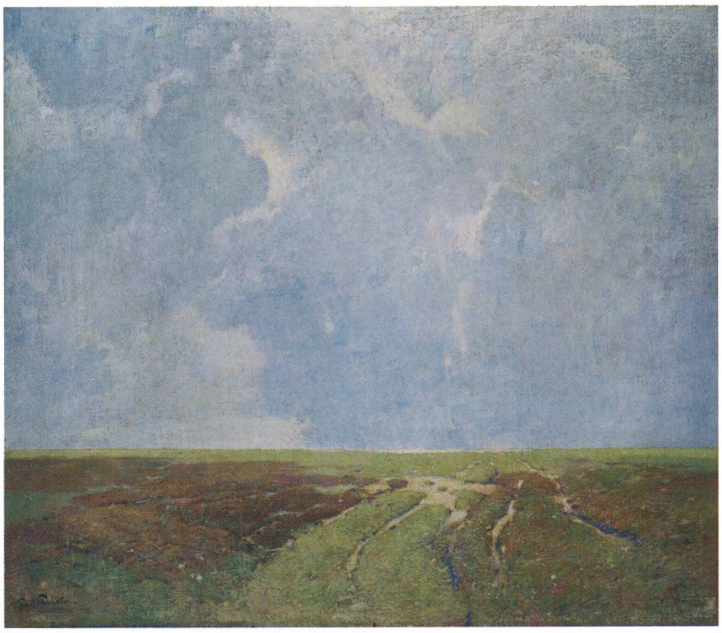


Fig. 8.108. Emil Carlsen, *Marsh Landscape*, c. 1920. Oil on canvas, 30½ x 35 in. Courtesy Questroyal Fine Art.

simply mimic nature but offer a kind of parallel universe that is as palpable as it is visionary. Carlsen's *Marsh Landscape*, circa 1920 (fig. 8.108), offers an extraordinary minimalist vision based almost exclusively on surface textures, produced by repeatedly applying and then scraping away paint (a technique both Ralph Albert Blakelock and J. Francis Murphy had pioneered), and embedding patterns, which haunt the viewer because of the strange amalgam of naturalistic and artificially constructed land and sky shapes.

Carlsen's status as a classic modernist was recognized as early as 1908 in a *New York Times* review that praised the artist's sincerity and lack of ostentation—for an art "that does not flaunt itself in the face of the public. That is Emil Carlsen whose work reflects a sane, clear mind that is as indifferent to the revolutionary blatherings of the 'rebels,' 'revolutionists,' and all other anarchists of the brush as he is serenely unconcerned about academic conventions, even though he is a teacher in our beloved National Academy of Design."[169] Coming at the time of Henri's revolt of The Eight, the reviewer, possibly Charles de Kay, is making a case for Tonalism that is in effect timeless in its aspirations to reveal the world anew. De Kay wrote of a Carlsen exhibition a year later in 1909, noting the importance the artist placed on his finely textured surfaces: "But nothing accounts for the result except a vision sensitive to the most august aspects of nature and a will concentrating upon reproducing their essential character. One is tempted to speak of an imaginative vision, since it is only those possessed of powerful imaginations who can see so clearly what is real and actual."[170] Such a transcendent truth or "superior realism" encapsulated the revolutionary ardor of the generation that had rebelled against the National Academy of Design and the stifling realism of the Hudson River School more than thirty years earlier. Carlsen had merged his Danish training and sensibility with this new strain of "American 'tone,'" as a 1933 retrospective review of his life termed it, underlining Tonalism's adaptive dynamic, which allowed its abstract energies to evolve in countless directions, without the necessity of proclaiming as much to the world in terms of a doctrinal stance (though it was certainly identified for its American character). Carlsen epitomizes in many ways the aesthetic stance of the Tonalists and why they rarely joined together to tout their style or issue manifestos (George Inness, Henry Ward Ranger, Birge Harrison, and Whistler did so on on their own terms in this stoic Transcendentalist faith): the Tonalist movement encompassed a creative drive that was, essentially, the dynamic preserve of the individual soul.

The 1913 Armory Show and the Eclipse of the Tonalist Movement

It is against this ubiquitous backdrop of Tonalism in the first decade of the twentieth century that the movement's subsequent decline and later near-obscurity can properly be understood. In effect, Tonalism's legacy was so deeply embedded in the American cultural landscape—the gray of modern life, to use Sadakichi Hartmann's phrase, that its presence acted like a low-toned scrim, merging, at least in the mind's eye, the fine and decorative arts in a seamless cultural whole. In the heyday of the movement, Tonalism influenced the very fabric of everyday life from women's gowns to Tiffany lamps: modulating colors, toning down contrasts, harmonizing, aestheticizing, and emphasizing symbolic natural form in art objects and architecture. In the sphere of aesthetics and even religion, it encouraged a high-minded integrity, what Charles de Kay described as an American "spirit of moral reticence,"[171] a spirituality both transcendent and mysterious, offering the enlightened a hope of solace—in Hartmann's words again, "some science for the soul." That Tonalism fulfilled this cultural role magnificently across the fine and decorative arts—a ubiquitous presence that virtually tinctured the mood of an era, in effect hiding in plain sight—can scarcely be doubted. So completely was Tonalism identified with its time that it remained almost invisible to later art historians, or simply dismissed along with the benighted tastes of a staid and colorless generation of Victorians.

This explains in part why the Armory Show of 1913 in New York came as such a shock to the cultural sensibilities of America, or why it was simply laughed off and dismissed, and, not least, why the exhibition has been portrayed as such a watershed in the history of American art (fig. 8.109). Organized by the Tonalist artist Arthur B. Davies, the huge and ambitious Armory Show was planned to promote America's most progressive artists by displaying them with examples from with the best radical artists and art movements in Europe, not unlike what the Comparative Exhibition of Native and Foreign Art of 1904 had undertaken. The Armory Show *was* critically important to the development of Post-Impressionist modernism in America, especially in its Cubist and Fauvist forms, and jolted establishment artistic circles. That it resulted in a total transformation of a moribund American art scene is another matter all together—one that can be judged once the vital heritage of Tonalism is properly put in context.

As has been seen, Tonalism in many modified forms maintained a strong presence into the second decade of the twentieth century (as reflected on the auction block and in the decorative arts) and even into the 1920s. The Armory Show of 1913 tipped the balance and precipitated the style's slow decline, at least in progressive art circles, enthroning European modernism and its use of often vivid color as an energetic new force that galvanized many—but not all—of the most talented and determined practitioners on the art scene of the day. Other major American artists, especially those in the Stieglitz circle, went on to develop within the existing tradition of low-toned Transcendental Romanticism. The sometimes shrill and often caustic critical and public reaction to the European modernists, especially the Fauvist and Cubist contingent in the Armory Show, has, in retrospect, framed the American response as antediluvian and unenlightened. But it should be remembered that the response of Robert Henri and many of his Ashcan School colleagues was one of bewildered chagrin at the unintended consequences of the exhibition. The thunder of The Eight—who had expected the Armory Show to demonstrate the triumph of their American brand of vigorous realism—evaporated, seemingly overnight; instead, European modernism became a Trojan horse on American shores and allowed the French to steal a progressive march on the Americans. Rarely are matters so clear cut.

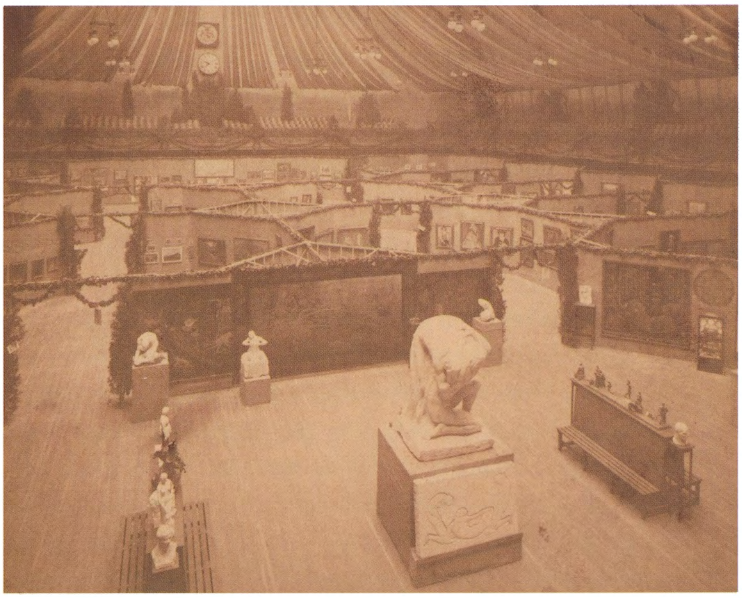


Fig. 8.109. Armory Show, interior view, 1913. Walt Kuhn, Kuhn Family Papers, and Armory Show Records, 1859–1978, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Many progressive critics thought the Europeans had simply injected into the old academic narrative formulas a primitivist carnality. The art to them seemed part of a cerebral competition to invent something new and daring: the counter-battery fire that Picasso, Matisse, and Braque engaged in during the early part of their careers. Shock value was the currency of the realm. This bothered the New England mind, now the American mind, because it went against deeply embedded Emersonian tenets: that what matters is the creative fire engendered by the subjective workings of the soul. From this standpoint, the Europeans displayed a blight of consciousness layered on self-consciousness, imposing a straitjacket on the process of art instead of allowing the art to arise out of the intuitive and creative act itself. The Americans, lacking an official art establishment or salon system that provided a ready target for radical movements, preferred their innovators in the guise of solitary geniuses like Ryder or Blakelock, Thoreau or Whitman, with change that bubbled up from the citizenry rather than being imposed by government or by a revolutionary cadre. Such issues would remain a centerpiece of critical and artistic battles for decades to come.

Instead of highlighting American progress in the arts, the Armory Show reinstituted a sense of inferiority among America's intellectual elites, the like of which had not been known since the 1870s, when so many artists had left for Paris after the Civil War. This occurred at the very moment when the prime generation of Tonalists (born between 1840 and 1865) had reached establishment status and financial and artistic success. After fighting and surviving European preeminence for more than thirty years, after struggling to replace the academic art of the school of Paris with a distinctive progressive style of American landscape art, suddenly the tables were turned on the Americans. The Europeans were back, and European modernism was acclaimed (when not dismissed outright as a fraud by conservative critics) as the newest new thing for the future of art.

To the horror of Henri and his crowd of realists, the coup against American artistic interests had been instituted by one of their own, none other than a compatriot and colleague, Arthur B. Davies (abetted by Walt Kuhn and Walter Pach). Even more troubling, Davies (fig. 8.110) was an insider's insider, a big seller for William Macbeth of breathless Whistlerian dreamscapes tapping into popular Symbolist themes of the day—hardly revolutionary stuff. Yet Davies had assiduously scoured Europe for the best of the modern movement in art and deftly managed the assemblage of the entire exhibition to the advantage of the Europeans, supported financially, in large part, by his main patron Lizzie Bliss. As related by art historian Bennard Perlman, when Henri ran into Davies and Walter Pach just before the opening of the Armory Show, he was stunned by what he saw. "Henri glanced down at the brilliant colors of some fauve paintings leaning against the partition, then back at Pach. 'I hope that for every French picture that is sold, you sell an American one,' he asserted. Pach replied to his former teacher, 'That's not the proportion of merit.' For a moment Henri remained motionless with his head bowed, then as Davies and Pach began to move away he called after them, 'If the Americans find that they've just been working for the French, they won't be prompted to do so again.'"[172] Decades later, the Social Realist painter Jerome Myers wrote of the Armory Show: "Davies had unlocked the door to foreign art and thrown away the key. Our land of opportunity was thrown wide open to foreign art, unrestricted and triumphant; more than ever before, our great country had become a colony; more than ever before we had become provincials."[173]

Davies's Armory Show radically shifted perceptions. For the next two generations, the source of modernist art—and the most forward-looking ideas in general—was, in many minds, to be found exclusively in Europe, in the work of Picasso, Cézanne, Matisse, the Cubists, the Fauves, and the Post-Impressionists, and in Wassily Kandinsky's ideas on spirituality and abstraction.

Adding insult to injury, and one irony on top of another, American art historians embraced the notion that the Armory Show not only represented a huge jolt of revolutionary and creative artistic fervor but was, in fact, the necessary shock treatment for an otherwise dying American art, a wasteland of desiccated parochialism. This was not what Davies expected nor how he later saw it. Progressives like Davies, Kuhn, and Pach had hoped that by placing the best advanced American art alongside the newest and boldest of the Europeans, the Americans' status as moderns of equal weight—or at least players in the same league—might be substantiated.[174] They were hoisted by their own petard. The American progressives—Tonalists and realists and even the more pronounced modernists, who had already adopted Fauvist and Cubist styles—ended up being overshadowed by both the outrage and the enthusiasm caused by the most advanced examples of Cubism and Fauvism produced by the Europeans, leading to the dismissal of most American artists of the day as retardataire by subsequent art historians and critics.

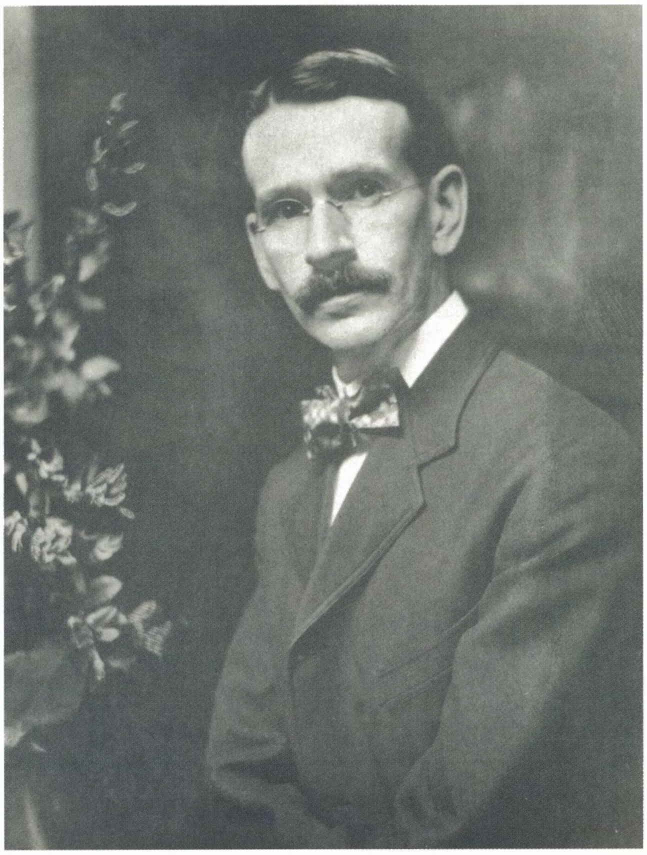


Fig. 8.110. Arthur B. Davies, photographed c. 1908. The 1913 Armory Show, 50th Anniversary Exhibition Records, 1962–1963. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Some forty years later, the respected art historian Milton Brown could write of the period of the Armory Show: "In that roseate atmosphere of inflated self-confidence every academy exhibition was hailed as an advance over that of the previous year, although, in reality, each was a dull repetition of the preceding. We boasted pridefully that our landscape school was the best in the world, when it was only a belated echo of the long-dead French tradition of Barbizon painting. The artists who went abroad to study in the various Parisian ateliers came in contact with and absorbed the formularized and lifeless art of the French Academy, of Laurens and Gérôme, apparently oblivious to the portentous developments which had occurred and were still occurring in another realm of French art. Comparing themselves as they did with European academicians, they were not unjustified in judging themselves the equals of what they considered the best that Europe had to offer." Brown goes on to dismiss what he saw as the false glamour and narrow American art scene that extolled George Inness, Thomas Dewing, John La Farge, Homer Dodge Martin, Alexander Wyant, and Whistler, among others: "Its standards of judgment were technical proficiency and conformity to some acceptable tradition, a scheme of things which unfortunately left little room for a vital art. No period in our art history was as self-satisfied, and with as little reason."[175]

A full fifty years after the Armory Show, when parts of the 1913 exhibition were re-created in New York in 1963, John Canaday, the *New York Times* critic, could write about this bouleversement for Henri and his followers: "As things turned out, this rugged Americanism was swamped by European importations. The realists were recognized, all right, but were recognized as laggard provincials in contrast to sophisticated innovators."[176] Milton Brown, who assembled the 1963 fiftieth-anniversary exhibition and wrote the accompanying catalogue and another book about the Armory Show, did not change his disparaging view of turn-of-the-century American art.[177] Brown's passion for modernism was fueled in large part by a Marxist analysis of class-consciousness as key to artistic revolt and progress. He dismissed art for art's sake, precisely because, as a movement, it did not respond to issues of social justice. "The concept of art for art's sake, which is nothing more than a philosophical acceptance of a social condition wherein art is disenfranchised, became with time the curtain behind which art developed without social check to the heights of individual and personal expression."[178] From the perspective of Brown, who who was unaware of the movement's democratic dynamic, and other like-minded historians, Tonalism may have been less invisible than simply irrelevant.

As has been demonstrated through examples of the criticism of Charles de Kay and others, and especially in the work of more than fifty Tonalists—largely unknown or derided by Brown—the progressive history and heritage of Tonalism was, in fact, premised precisely on a break with and rejection of French academic styles. In terms of quality and numbers, the Tonalist movement formed the bedrock of a very American progressive force in both the fine and decorative arts, a movement that had not only left French Barbizon sources behind some thirty years before 1913, but had renounced French Impressionism in its late academic and largely imitative guise, and produced landscapists (especially in the Symbolist vein) as good as, if not better than much of what Europe had to offer. The finest American Tonalists compared themselves to Manet, Monet, Degas, Sisley, and other advanced French painters. In fact, America's brand of progressive art was there to be seen in the Armory Show of 1913 in the work of Whistler, Albert Pinkham Ryder, John Henry Twachtman, Henry Muhrman, J. Alden Weir, and the French-born Leon Dabo (1868–1960), as well as in that of John Marin, Marsen Hartley, Alfred Maurer, and Walt Kuhn—American artists who were influenced by French Cubism and Fauvism. With the full scope of the Tonalist movement properly understood, the Armory Show represents less a revolution in art than the superseding—for a time—of one progressive movement by another, with Fauvism and Cubism in particular simply overshadowing the older Tonalist or Whistlerian wing of modernism, which already included many in the Stieglitz circle, and would eventually include Milton Avery, the Abstract Expressionists, and postmodern Tonalists like Wolf Kahn. Such a perspective was unknown, overlooked, or uncongenial to mid-twentieth-century art critics and historians.

In truth, the Armory Show did portray the continuity between the Tonalist tradition and the ongoing progressive movement in American art, precisely as Davies, Kuhn, and the members of American Association of Artists and Sculptors had always intended. Davies, with the help of the artist William Glackens and others, had carefully chosen those Americans he considered fundamental to the progressive Tonalist heritage, which his life and work had always espoused. Yet he intentionally placed the Americans at the rear of the exhibition space, saving the galleries near the entrance for his favorite Europeans, such as Redon and van Gogh. Thus, viewers would first see the advanced European art before they reached the American contingent. Whistler, the only one of the first-generation Tonalists to be included, was honored with four figurative works (two from Macbeth, priced at $8,500 each). Key Tonalists of the 1840–65 generation included Albert Pinkham Ryder (who had ten prominently exhibited works hung together, many already in major collections); J. Frank Currier (an oil landscape); John Henry Twachtman (two landscapes, one from the collection of John Gellatly, and one from Macbeth priced at a astounding $6,000), Henry Muhrman (an oil landscape; Muhrman's stature in 1913 can be guaged by the fact that as far back as 1901 Davies had eagerly visited with him in London); Weir (fourteen works, including watercolors and etchings, and the oil painting *Factory Village*, priced at $5,000); Leon Dabo (four landscapes, for $1,000 each, see *Evening North Sierra*, 1912, p. 530; and *Canadian Night*, c. 1912, p. 531), Charles Harold Davis (one landscape, priced at $1,500), Hermann Dudley Murphy; and Davies himself (six works, the highest priced at $2,800). Curiously, Ralph Albert Blakelock, who in 1913 sold a painting at auction for $13,900—the most to that date ever paid for a living American artist—was not included by Davies. Members of The Eight—almost all working in a Tonalist vein—were also well represented and included Ernest Lawson (three Tonalist landscapes); John

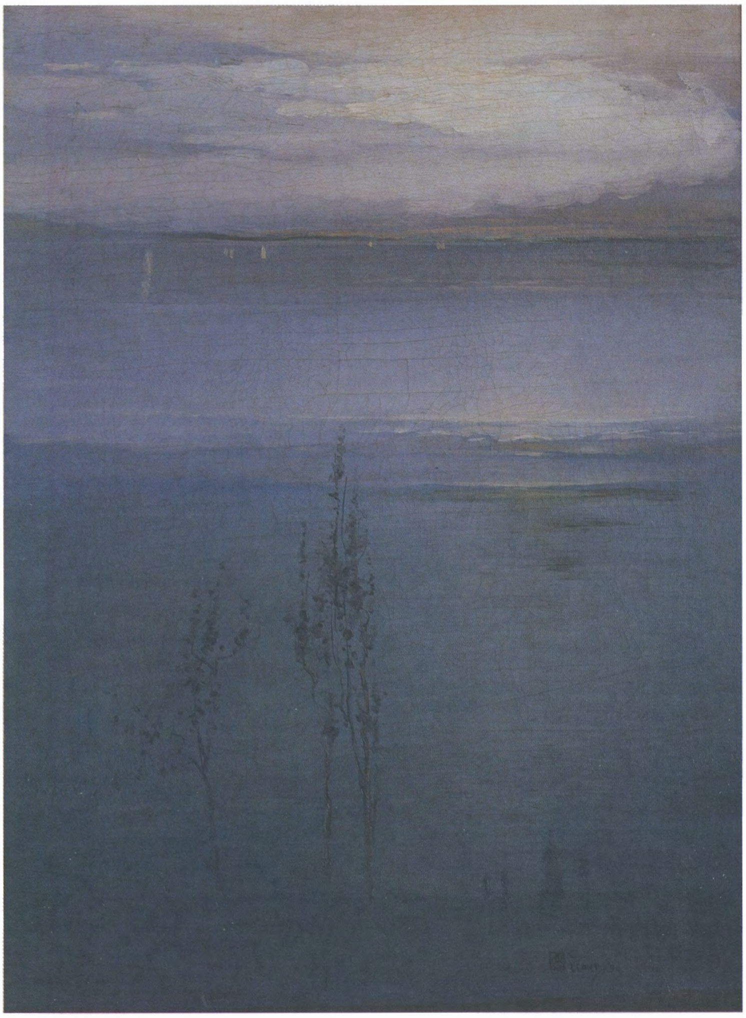


Fig. 8.110.1. Leon Dabo, *Evening North Sierra*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 27x 36 in. Courtesy Robert di Domizio, New York.

Sloan (numerous tonal etchings and oils of working-class life), William Glackens (works in the style of Renoir), and Robert Henri (a near life-size nude). Realists included George Bellows, who exhibited circus and sporting events, and Edward Hopper, who sold one of his first oils, a seascape with sailboat.

Many other Americans who were exhibited, such as Walt Kuhn, Leon Kroll, Charles Sheeler, Alfred Maurer, Morton Schamberg, Joseph Stella, Stuart Davis, Andrew Dasburg, and Maurice Prendergast displayed various European modes of Cubism, Fauvism, and Expressionism. Missing were most of the cosmopolitan Impressionists who made up The Ten: notably the Boston contingent of Frank Benson, Edmund Tarbell, and Joseph DeCamp, along with William Merritt Chase, Willard Metcalf, Robert Reid, and Edward Simmons. Davies and Glackens seemingly found only Mary Cassatt, Childe Hassam, and Theodore Robinson of the Impressionist persuasion worthy of inclusion. John Singer Sargent was another glaring omission. Last, but far from least, of the Americans to be featured were members of the emerging Stieglitz circle: John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Oscar Bluemner (Davies selected two oils and three watercolors by Bluemner from a host of submissions—only one example of Davies's superb eye; Bluemner would go on to develop along Tonalist and boldly Symbolist lines in the 1920s). These artists, along with major figures like Arthur Dove and Georgia O'Keeffe, would transform the Tonalist heritage and take it in new directions in the following decades.

In terms of the history of American modernism—in the arc from Stieglitz, Dove, Marin, and Milton Avery to Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, and the Abstract Expressionists—the Tonalist contingent represented in the Armory Show of 1913, though relatively few in number and with little media impact on a public enthralled or outraged by European modernism, did have both staying power and long-term influence. Some of their influence may have had as much to do with underlying cultural traits and national proclivities as exposure to particular artists or paintings. Writing in the *New York Times* in 1913, Charles de Kay discussed the Armory Show and tried to tease out those traits that differentiated American art from European, the core values of the Americans that were seemingly under threat from European ideas, or what he described as "primitive forces." De Kay admitted the influence of European art on many American artists in the Armory Show, ". . . but below the superficial resemblance lies, so far as we have observed, in almost every instance that spirit of moral reticence which is peculiar to America and differs entirely from the moral anxiety of the English spirit as it is revealed in the arts and, of course, still more from the sincere concern of the modern European schools with primitive forces."[179] Whether de Kay is referring to Fauvist styles, or the influence of primitive art on Picasso, or to underlying social, political, or psychological pathologies he detected in the Europeans, is hard to ascertain. But what he likes is the way Arthur Davies works with tradition and modernism. "In his landscapes with figures, beautiful landscapes of infinite distances, and figures not less beautiful, in which the noble rhythms of antique poetry are echoed, the 'imaginative reason' at the back of the conception is creative. The painter is not a copyist; he makes and remakes, but he never copies, and whenever we find that something he has done reminds us of something an old master has done we immediately perceive in it that distinguishing strain of deep reserve, the rich delicacy that refrains from offense not as a matter of prudery, but through an innate shrinking from thrusting ugliness and coarseness upon the innocent observer."[180]

De Kay then goes on to praise Walt Kuhn, Robert Henri's almost life-size nude (which might have shocked the older generation), John Marin's watercolors, and to rave about Odilon Redon, especially the Frenchman's imaginative grasp of deep human realities. The huge showing of more than fifty works by Odilon Redon was no accident. Davies, a great fan of Redon, had visited the artist in Paris to pick out works for exhibition, precisely because the Frenchman's Tonalist and symbolist sympathies were aligned with Davies's—they both shared a

Whistlerian heritage. The inclusion of Redon, who was much admired by Picasso, was another indication of the lengths that Davies had gone to in constructing a show that would put his own Symbolist art—and that of his Tonalist colleagues—in the best possible light relative to the avant-garde Europeans. Ironically, after the Armory Show, Davies tried his hand at a pseudo-Cubist style, which critics from his day to ours generally consider his weakest work. It would not be until the mid-1920s that Davies truly came into own, producing the finest work of his career, with his spare and abstract Tonalist watercolors and pastels of European landscapes (see *Blue Mountains*, fig. 5.47; and *Nocturne in Blue and Green*, 5.48).

From a contemporary perspective, de Kay might be faulted as too puritanical to face the unsettling sexual themes and ugliness of the real world and their expression in art, either in terms of the realist tradition represented by Henri's circle, which he largely embraced, or as expressed through the art-making process itself, as displayed in much of the European modernism on view in 1913 at the Armory Show. On the other hand, from the perspective of the Whistlerian or Tonalist wing of the modernist tradition, de Kay is simply echoing his message of more than thirty years' standing: art is fundamentally a creative product of the individual imagination and should be less concerned with reproducing the world as it is (much less grappling with political and social issues), and more with probing for deeper spiritual values and ills—the good, the bad, the poignant— that move the human soul on the deepest level.

In many respects, de Kay's viewpoint, which he shared with the critics Sadakichi Hartmann and Charles Caffin, and even a period academic art historian like Frank Jewett Mather, delimits the fault line between two modernist traditions. On one side is the Tonalist and Romantic direction espoused by Whistler, Inness, Emerson, William James, and the Transcendentalists who believed in the transformative significance of the subjective imagination—focusing on the individual conscience rather than society, and best symbolized in the art of landscape. On the other is European Post-Impressionism, which focused on a transformative and expressive figuration, espousing society's political, psychological, and sexual ills and needs—as well as the primitive drives behind the mask of civilization, all to the end of resolving social injustice and forging a path to a better future for humanity. Among the American critics there was much talk of the degeneracy of European art. But an art historian and enlightened critic like Frank Jewett Mather, a longtime champion of La Farge, Inness, Ryder, Martin, and Whistler, could be critical but also circumspect and selective in his viewpoint. Interestingly, where Mather parted ways with Cubism was that it reinstituted a narrative element in art, the very thing Whistler had banished decades before. Mather writes: "In short, so far as Post-Impressionism and Cubism are not mere sham they seem to me an insidious rebirth of the literary picture. Only the models have changed. The mid-Victorian literary picture was nourished on harmless anecdote. The Post-Impressionist or Cubist picture is spawned from the morbid intimations of symbolist poetry and distorted Bergsonian philosophy."[181]

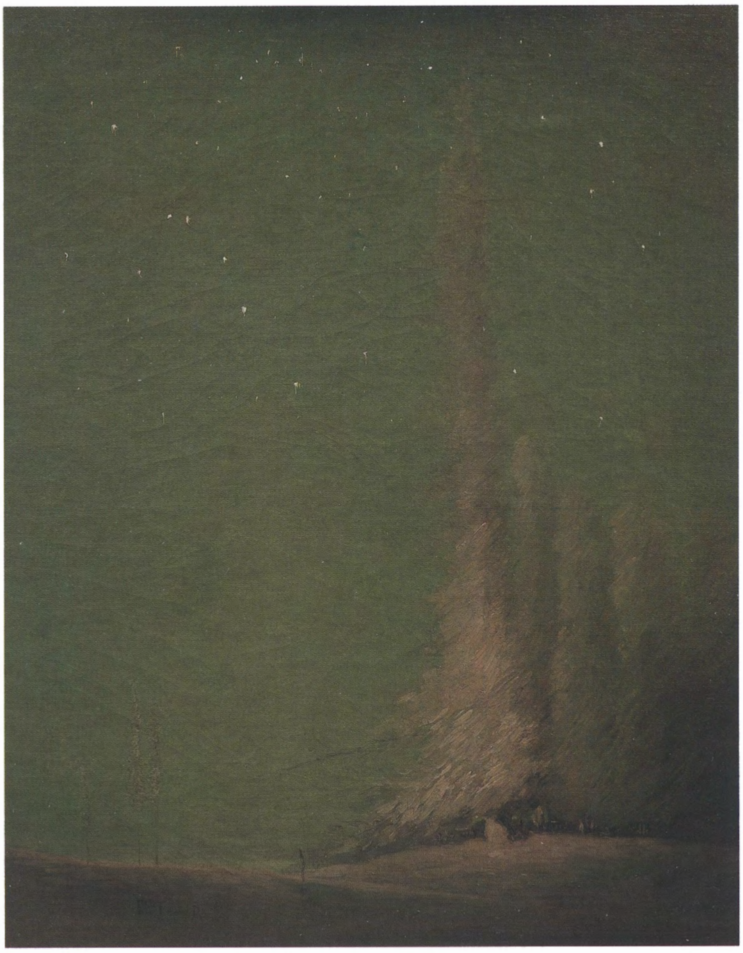


Fig. 8.110.2. Leon Dabo, *Canadian Night*, c. 1912. Oil on canvas, 30⅛ x 23⅛ in. Courtesy Stillwell House Antiques, New Jersey.

All in all, the Armory Show displayed the Tonalist, realist, and Post-Impressionist movements in American art quite judiciously. However described, the Tonalist or Romantic or Symbolist strain passed directly into the work of the Stieglitz circle and on to the Abstract Expressionists (for the most part bypassing the realist political camps, the European-influenced isms and their radical affinities, manifest on both the left and right during the Depression). Generally speaking, the Tonalist heritage remained focused on inner spiritual values (rather than political or social ones)—the still, soft voice of the landscape—that transcended the hubbub of competition in the economic or ideological marketplace of mid-century America.

Among the American Tonalists in the Armory Show, only Ryder, along with Whistler, Davies, and Twachtman, remained in the canon of American modernism right through the middle decades of the twentieth century. By the time of the exhibition, Ryder was an old and doddering recluse, but his mystical landscapes, like Davies's spiritualized tonal figurative works, were considered in the forefront of American art even in 1913. Ryder was a legend in his own time and crucial to the likes of Marsden Hartley and, later, Jackson Pollock. This point was clearly understood by Charles Caffin in his discussion of the Armory Show in 1913. "He is much nearer to the modern expression of intellectualized emotion than all but a few of the young men. In his unobtrusive sincerity he, in fact, anticipated that abstract expression toward which painting is returning and may almost be said to take his place as an old master in the modern movement."[182] If Whistler, Davies, Twachtman, and Ryder's reputations were enhanced by the Armory Show, along with members of The Eight, those of Currier, Muhrman, Weir—and other Tonalists not included—tended to fade, with the possible exception of Blakelock and Inness. But while the European-derived styles of Fauvism, Cubism, and various Post-Impressionist movements came and went in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, Tonalism's underlying romantic ideals—its spiritual force, expressive dynamic, and captivating symbolism—made its way into the work of the succeeding generation of American modernists who focused primarily on subjective, abstract, and formal values, many of them members of the group of advanced American artists associated with Alfred Stieglitz.

The Tonalist Movement and the Stieglitz Circle: John Marin (1870–1953), Marsden Hartley (1877–1943), and Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986)

The Pictorial photographer and modernist advocate Alfred Stieglitz displayed some ambivalence about the Armory Show. He was not happy to see the limelight turned away from his long-evolving concept of American modernism and the American artists he had been promoting in favor of the Europeans. He had two of his artists, John Marin and Marsden Hartley, included in the exhibition and loaned it other works. He also bought from the Armory Show a Davies pastel, an astute political and commercial move given Davies's high standing in progressive circles and the fact that Davies was the show's main organizer. Along with Davies, Stieglitz was a member of the prime generation of Tonalists and like many progressive artists of the day, he, in retrospect, tended to dodge his early artistic influences, especially Whistler, who by the 1930s was suspect as a purveyor of elitist art. Although Stieglitz and his admirers, and later art historians, often downplayed his formative origins, his Tonalist and Symbolist heritage, he, nevertheless, retained throughout his career a romantic attachment to nature and landscape.

Well before the 1913 Armory Show, Stieglitz and his growing circle of artists and writers were formulating a critical language to express a native sensibility in terms of a distinctly American modernism. Art historian Sarah Greenough, in her 2000 study of the Stieglitz circle, has written: "Like other proponents elsewhere, they advanced the concept of correspondence between the arts, reflecting their strong symbolist heritage, and insisted, as de Zayas and Paul Haviland wrote, that 'modern art does not aim at either representation or decoration and should be looked upon as aiming to give us an abstract emotion such as would be given us by music.'"[183] Greenough notes that Stieglitz and his artists also updated the Symbolist belief in synesthesia—"the possibility of suggesting one thing by means of another—and proposed the idea of equivalence. As de Zayas asserted in his 1911 essay on Picasso, the artist 'receives a direct impression from external nature,' which he analyzes, develops, and translates, 'with the intention that the picture should be the pictorial equivalent of the emotion produced by nature.'"[184]

Many of these ideas come directly out of the Whistlerian wing of the Tonalist movement, but it is the echo of George Inness from more than thirty years earlier that is particularly remarkable: The artist, wrote Inness, tries "simply to reproduce in other minds the impression which a scene has made upon him. A work of art does not appeal to the intellect. It does not appeal to the moral sense. Its aim is not to instruct, not to edify, but to awaken an emotion. . . . Its real greatness consists in the quality and the force of this emotion."[185] Inness's artistic credo and striving after the spiritual essence in nature—the unseen, fitted well with Stieglitz's anti-commercialism and deep bias against the materialistic outlook of business-mad America. In an interview about the Armory Show, Stieglitz proclaimed with zeal: "[A]rt begins where imitation ends." Greenough further observes: "With his strong romantic tendencies and elitist, Whistlerian symbolist heritage, Stieglitz had a deep belief in the artist as a creative genius, capable both of begetting works of great originality and of divining profound, even transcendental truths."[186] This Emersonian confidence in the power of individual ,subjective experience is matched only by Stieglitz's determination that America and New York should become the mecca of modernism, and more particularly the American artists he showed at his gallery, 291. In this, Stieglitz was following in the footsteps of Charles de Kay, who had provided Stieglitz's photographers—the Photo-Secessionists—with their first exhibition at the National Arts Club. Even as Stieglitz heralded the Amory Show, he pursued his vision of modernism with exhibitions of John Marin's watercolors and his own Pictorial or Tonalist photographs, many of New York from a decade earlier.

John Marin, born in 1870, five years after Robert Henri, placing him five years beyond the prime generation of Tonalists, illustrates well the career arc of many members of the post-Tonalist generation. Marin's first important works were the etchings and pastels he produced in Venice in 1907 (see *Ca 'd'Oro*, fig. 3.71; *Palazzo Dario*, fig. 5.62; and *Bridge, Venezia*, fig. 5.63). The influence of Whistler, though largely unacknowledged by Marin, who rarely revealed much about his influences, is explicit in the pastels and wonderfully updated with a modernist flair in the etchings. Marin's use of tone, or retroussage, in the etchings to soften, deepen, and add expression to the image is both evocative and haunting. Often he would wipe his plates in circular motion from the center outward to create a halo effect of tone around the perimeter, a kind of silent or spectral frame, which in time seems to have translated into his use of more graphic framing devices in his later watercolors.

Presumably it was this tonal quality and blurred, almost cloudlike forms that first appealed to Stieglitz's romantic nature; it was certainly apparent in Marin's first exhibition at Stieglitz's gallery, 291, in 1909, when twenty-five Marin watercolors were shown. The reaction of critic Charles Caffin—long a champion of the most innovative Tonalists—to Marin's expressive cutting-edge imagery illustrates the transition between the second and third generation of Tonalists, and the metamorphosis of the movement's spiritualizing power into a more modern vein. Caffin described the watercolors as "harmonies of indescribably delicate tonalities wrought on the Japanese principle of the Notan, a balance of dark and light, of the intimate relationship of contrasted values." Caffin further noted the influence of Asian art on Marin's work, "a more abstract way of receiving and of rendering the impression of the scene. It is not so much a visual as a spiritual impression, eliminating as far as possible the consciousness of the concrete. . . . The consciousness of facts disappears in a spiritualized vision of form and color, that I can best explain to myself by the way in which a composer will expand a motif into an elaborated harmony."[187] Caffin's essay, reprinted in Stieglitz's magazine *Camera Works*, which often published his essays and those by Sadakichi Hartmann on similar themes, demonstrates the subtle exchanges of style and technique between turn-of-the-century Tonalism and modernism; in effect, Stieglitz's gallery and publicity machine acted as a transmitter of creative energy from the older generation to the younger.

By 1913 and the Armory Show, Charles de Kay (who praised a "spirit of moral reticence" in the Americans) could find much to like in Marin's watercolors such as *Brooklyn Bridge*, circa 1912 (fig. 8.111). One suspects that after decades of conditioning by sometimes hazy and amorphous Tonalist art, American critics, who might be shocked by European Fauvist facture, or Matisse's turn to a faux-primitive style, found Marin's Cubist-inspired disintegration of form and spiritualizing style not only congenial but possibly uplifting and replete with poetic meaning. Even the most conservative American critics, could, when modernism was couched in Whistlerian dematerialized form, find a great deal to admire. Marin's own explanation of his frothy jumble of teetering bridges and skyscrapers touches on the communication of subjective emotion that Stieglitz and his artists valued above all else. "Shall we consider the life of a great city as confined simply to the people and animals on its streets and in its buildings? Are the buildings themselves dead? . . . I see great forces at work; great movements . . . pushing, pulling, sideways, downwards, upwards, I can hear the sound of their strife and there is great music being played. And so I try to express graphically what a great city is doing."[188] Eight of Marin's cityscapes on exhibition at 291 were transferred and displayed in the Armory Show (Davies certainly found a fellow mystic in Marin)—one of many ways in which Stieglitz wanted to make the point that *he* was the source of modernism in America. Marin's later watercolors and paintings of the Maine coast would express similar emotions about the forces of weather and sea, a graphic display of subjective power with which George Inness, or even Homer, would have immediately recognized a kinship.

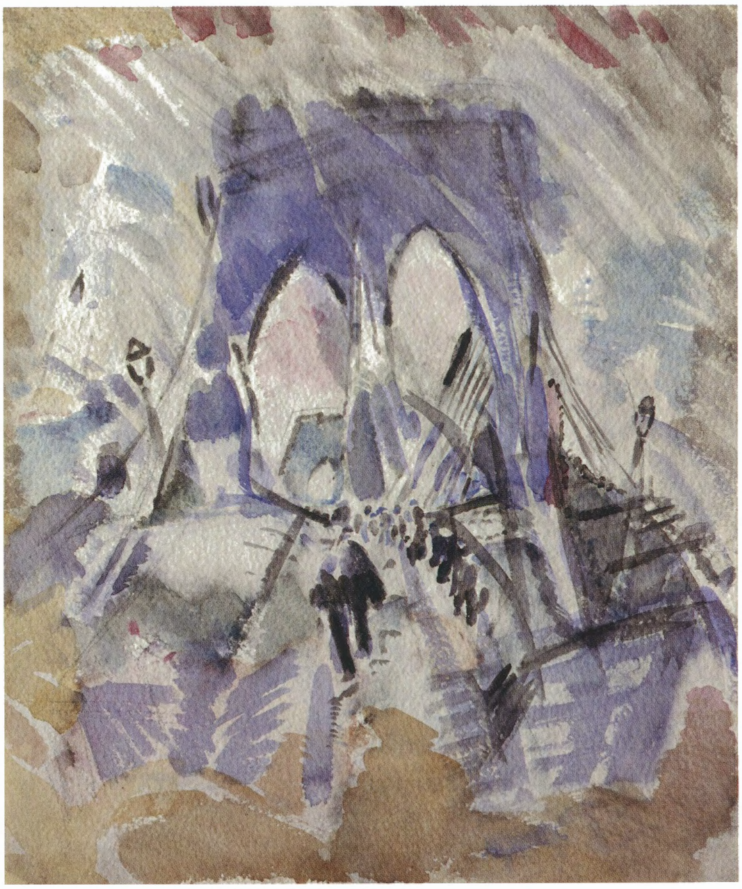
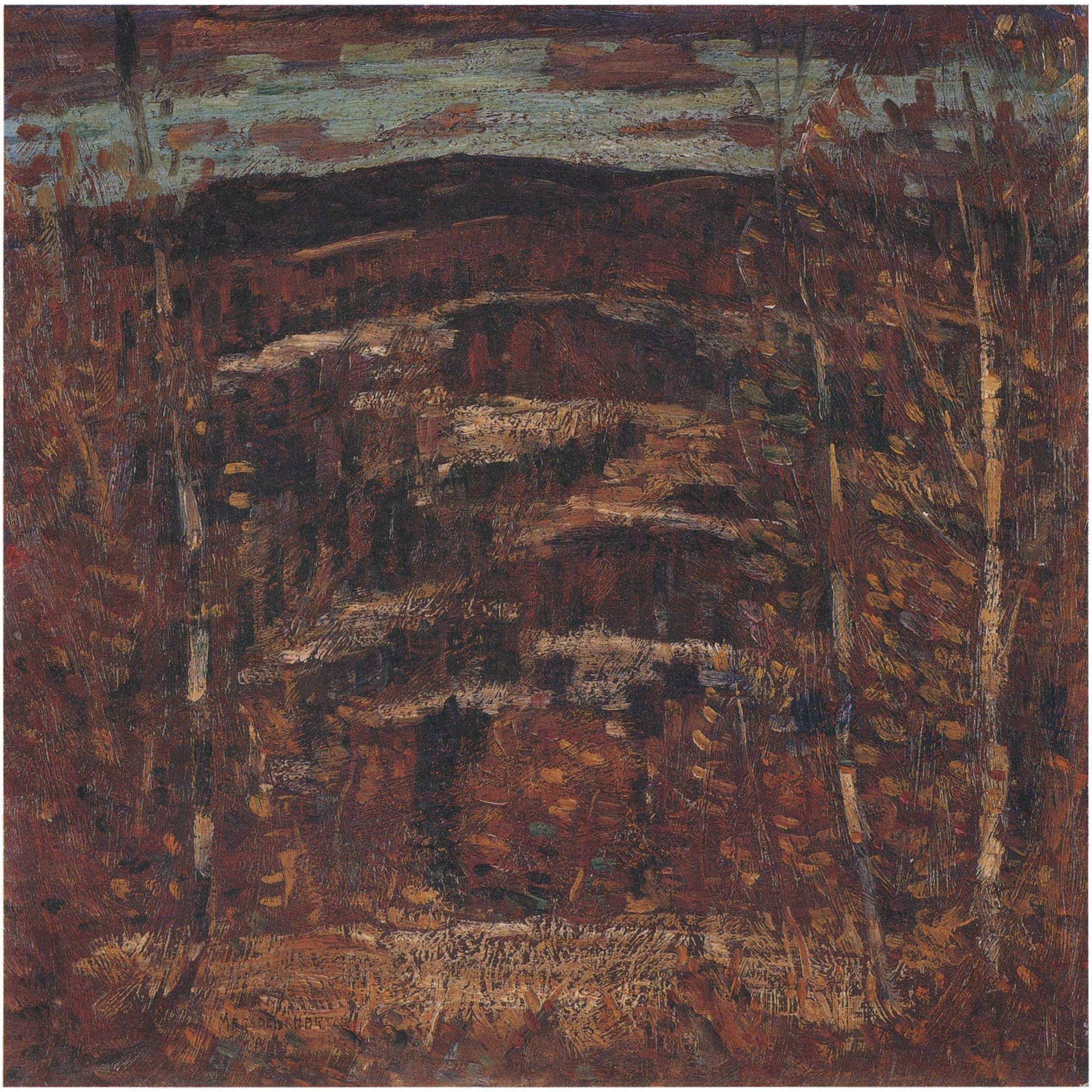


Fig. 8.111. John Marin, *Brooklyn Bridge*, c. 1912. Watercolor and charcoal on paper, 18⅝ x 15⅝ in. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

After the devastation of World War I, Stieglitz drew about him a circle of like-minded and fellow spirits in pursuit of an all-American brand of modernism: artists, writers, photographers, and critics who would form a close-knit community for mutual support. John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Arthur Dove, Paul Strand, Oscar Bluemner, and Georgia O'Keeffe (whom Stieglitz would marry in 1924), were drawn to similar goals: a modernist vision based on American literary



Fig, 8.112. Marsden Hartley, *After Snow*, c. 1908. Oil on academy board, 12 x 12 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

and romantic ideals, rooted in the American experience of the land and nature, and evocative of their peculiar place and time. They were certainly willing—even eager—to come to terms with their European heritage—to learn what they could technically, as had the generation of artists who matured in the late 1870s and 1880s, but not necessarily to be defined or guided, much less inspired, by the political agendas of their European colleagues. To some degree, self-selectively or otherwise, Stieglitz's artists had been inoculated against de Kay's "primitive forces" (whether Freudian ideas or Marxist concepts of class consciousness), and the radical politics that galvanized large elements of European modernism. All the artist's in Stiglitz's circle were deeply influenced on one level or another by their Tonalist heritage, either as expressed in the visual arts, in particular the work of Whistler, Inness, Wyant, Twachtman and Ryder, or in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau. Much of their imagery was derived from the natural world and based on a deeply emotional and personal connection to the land and soil, with the goal of an intuitive and spiritual language that spoke directly to the American experience, or, as Stieglitz called it, "a feeling of life."[189]

If John Marin was influenced early on by Tonalist style and technique, particularly Whistler's etchings and pastels, Marsden Hartley's first allegiance had more to do with the cultural ethos inherent in the Tonalist tradition and its underlying emotional component, though he, too, was directly inspired by Twachtman and Ryder. Hartley, born in 1877 and thus seven years younger than Marin, and certainly with a more visceral attraction to European modernism than Marin, could never entirely escape the gravitational force of the older generation of Tonalists. From an early age, Hartley treasured a volume of Emerson's *Essays*, which he carried around with him for five years. His childhood was filled with collecting natural objects and being entranced by their colors and textures. Emerson's and later Thoreau's emphasis on an intuitive understanding of man's place in nature inspired Hartley throughout his life: the Transcendentalists were the guiding star of his wanderings and his often unhappy life. As he wrote to a friend as a young man, "There is nothing that sets all things at peace with me as a communion with Nature. She seems to have a balm for every pain and a cheerful song for every sorrowing heart."[190] This feeling for the indwelling divinity of nature would inform Hartley's best painting throughout his life. In terms of style and technique, Hartley was early influenced by the decorative aspects of John Twachtman's art and Japanese prints, and probably the work if not the teachings of Arthur Dow. In 1905 he adapted a Neo-Impressionist approach, using the stitchlike technique found in the work of the Italian painter Giovanni Segantini. Hartley's paintings of Maine hillsides, for example, *After Snow*, circa 1908 (fig. 8.112), through employing broken facture, retain a distinct tonal feel in terms of muted color and graphic read of natural form. Arthur B. Davies felt they embodied a kind of American mysticism (thus assuring Hartley's inclusion in the Armory Show)—precisely the kind of indwelling spiritual quality that Stieglitz loved. Hartley's first exhibition with Stieglitz in 1909 very much impressed Sadakichi Hartmann, practically a spokesman for the Whistlerian wing of Tonalism, even as the critic struggled to accept the artist's Impressionist-style facture. "The depth and distance across the valley to the mountain, the plastic modeling and faithful detail, the hardiness and vigor or representation, showed knowledge of form and sincerity of sentiment. It was the color scheme, however, that startled the beholder. It produced a strictly physical sensation. It irritated the retina and exhausted it. After leaving the gallery Fifth Avenue looked more grey than usual. A melancholy vocation for such a robust phase of art!"[191]

The experience of Hartley's Neo-Impressionist style launched Hartmann on a ruminating article in *Camera Work*, in which he tried to identify the legitimate uses of Impressionist facture among the hosts of facile imitators, and where it might add a genuinely new dimension to the more highly finished Tonalist style. On this score, the skeptical Hartmann approved of the gains Hartley had achieved: "As long as [Hartley] applies his colors in a temperamental, self-taught manner, his is above the approach of imitation. I for my part believe that he has invented his method for himself, up there in Maine amidst the scenery of his fancy, and that only gradually he has learnt to reproduce nature in her most intense and luminous coloring."[192] Crucial to Hartmann's evaluation was Hartley's courage and sincerity—that individual, all-American approach that Charles de Kay had always found to be the gold standard of genuine distinction. Hartmann, like de Kay, Caffin, and other progressive critics, was perfectly capable of understanding and appreciating the modernist transformations that the Tonalist style was undergoing in the hands of Marin, Hartley, O'Keeffe, Arthur Dove, and Oscar Bluemner.[193]

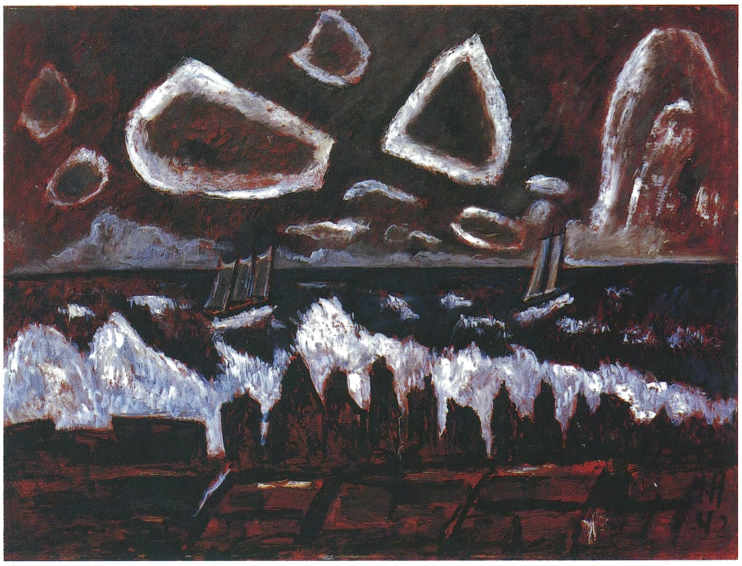


Fig. 8.113. Marsden Hartley, *Off the Banks at Night*, 1942. Oil on hardboard, 30 x 40 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

In 1909, Hartley discovered Albert Pinkham Ryder, de Kay's paragon of homespun artistic virtue from forty years earlier. For Hartley, Ryder provided a vision of his roots, his innermost soul. "I was converted to the field of imagination into which I was born. . . . I had been thrown back into the body and being of my own country."[194] Hartley even sought out the old artist to pay his respects, going on to paint a series of dark, brooding landscapes that magnificently reprise Ryder's symbolic cloud forms (to be found again and again in Hartley's art), working by way of memory and imagination to delve into the landscape as never before. Perhaps most fascinating about Hartley's often desperate up-and-down life and career was how often he was captivated by European styles and conceptual modes, resulting in work that was at times magnificent and at others less so, and how just as often he retreated back to his roots in the New England landscape to re-engineer his style. Hartley took the abstracting and symbolizing motives at the heart of the Tonalist aesthetic, touched with the colorist verve of the Fauvists, and projected this power into the creation of a personal landscape iconography. His landscapes, often with pigment laid in with impastoed gusto—a gestural expression of his often troubled life—seem grounded in the quiet of the searching soul. *Off the Banks at Night*, 1942 (fig. 8.113), with it eerie schematic clouds and dark, brooding quality, is a striking and expressive tribute to Albert Pinkham Ryder.

In 1925, Stieglitz held an exhibition of what became known as the Seven Americans, which included Hartley, Marin, Dove, O'Keeffe and others, displaying the various artists' approaches to landscape, still life, and motifs derived from the natural world. For Marin it was a portrayal of inner life, for others it was a revelation of the spiritual, the intuitive, the unconscious quest, or as Georgia O'Keeffe described it: "Making the unknown—known."[195] Here was yet another echo

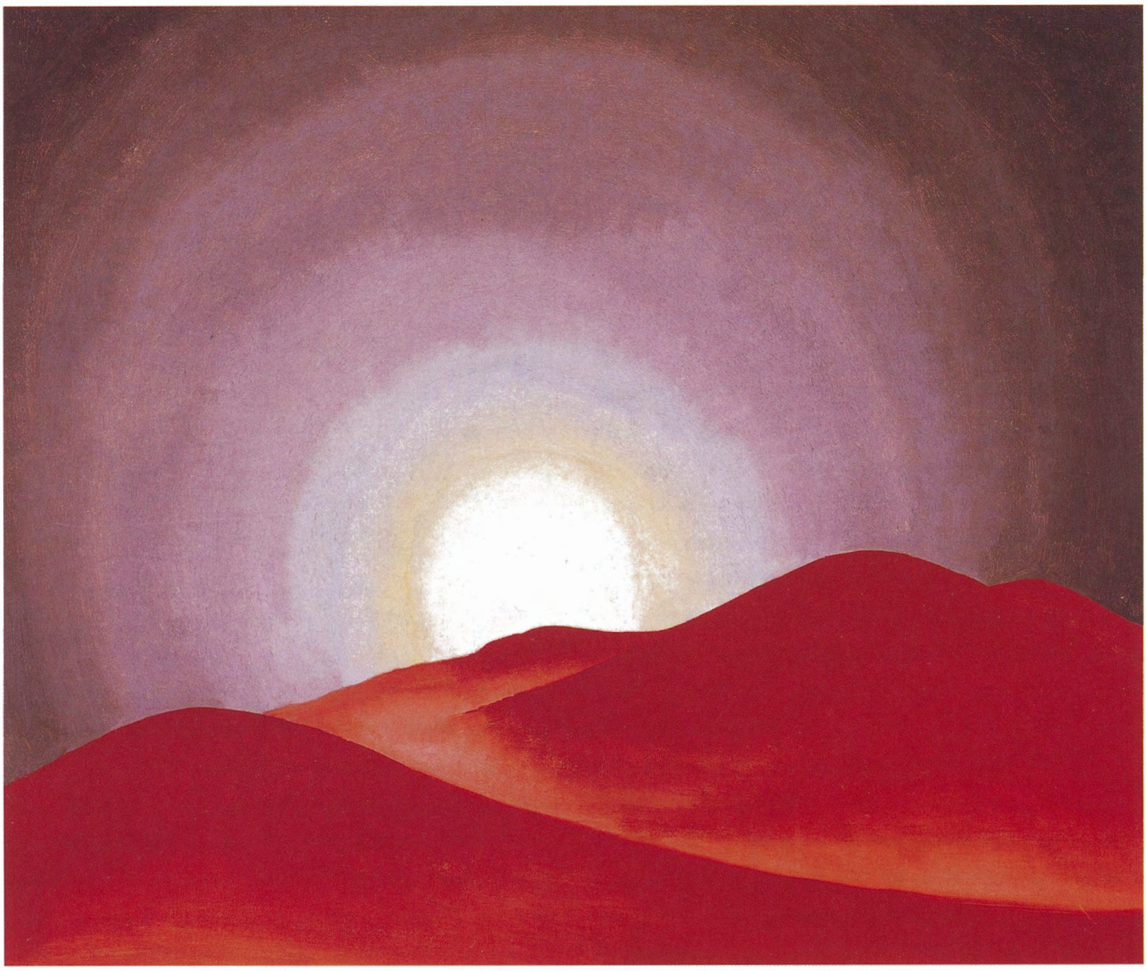


Fig. 8.114. Georgia O'Keeffe, *Red Hills, Lake George*, 1927. Oil on canvas, 27 x 32 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

of Inness; making the unseen seen. For more than thirty years, Stieglitz maintained a focus through his artists, exhibitions, and writings on developing a distinctive homegrown brand of American modernism, rooted in the land and the experience of the land. Georgia O'Keeffe had the example and writings of her teacher, Arthur Wesley Dow, especially in regard to the use of eye-catching pattern. O'Keeffe's *Red Hills, Lake George*, 1927 (fig. 8.114), besides displaying the artist's penchant of relying on memory for inspiration and on Kandinsky's tantalizing ideas about abstraction and spirituality in art, echoes Dow's soft, modulating tones and use of large, descriptive patterns to evoke mood and create symbols of a very personal kind. The Stieglitz group drew on the visual, literary, and philosophical resources of the Tonalist heritage, the artistic milieu from which all had emerged after the turn of the century.

Like the Tonalists' forebears who emerged out of the shadows of their European training in the 1870s and 1880s, Stieglitz's circle paid homage to European modernism but kept a discreet distance. The sculptural analytics of Cubism found almost no foothold in the Stieglitz circle, while Fauvist color usage certainly had its uses. Stieglitz and his artists were both coy about and fiercely protective of their indigenous sources of inspiration and the peculiarly American spiritual power that resonated in their imagery, imagery at once bound to concrete reality while soaring into the stratosphere. The critic Clement Greenberg found Marin, Hartley, and Dove, along with Milton Avery, to be the most American of the modernists: "[T]hey clung to the truth of their own very personal experience, however intimate, modest, or unenhanceable that truth was."[196] There is something spare, remote, lonely, and elegiac in their work, whether of a rugged coastline by Marin or Hartley's Maine, or the barren deserts of O'Keeffe's Southwest, or sequences of clouds floating past a fugitive moon in the photography of Stieglitz himself. Much of Marin, O'Keeffe, Dove, Stieglitz, Strand, and even Hartley in this early and late work retain a Tonalist temperament in the limited low-hued colors and emphasis on form and texture. Much of this had to do with the influence of black-and-white photography on the group, a medium which Stieglitz had long championed. Because the monochromatic and tonal nature of the photographic medium emphasized form over field, the very nature of the aesthetic seems to have influenced the Stieglitz group. In addition, the artists' work was regularly photographed for catalogues; these photographs were then studied, promoting further refinements in subsequent work in terms of formal, tonal, and compositional issues. The natural abstraction of landscape forms that had always been at the heart of Tonalist movement from Inness and Whistler to Twachtman and Tryon remained just as beguiling to the artists in the Stieglitz circle as their forbears: in turn this organic abstraction—the symbolism of nature itself—became the cynosure of further excursions into the modernist repertoire, or as Stieglitz noted: "[A]rt begins where imitation ends."[197] This natural symbolization, or sense of the sublime inherent in nature, would in time, inform the work of the Abstract Expressionists in the 1950s and 1960s.

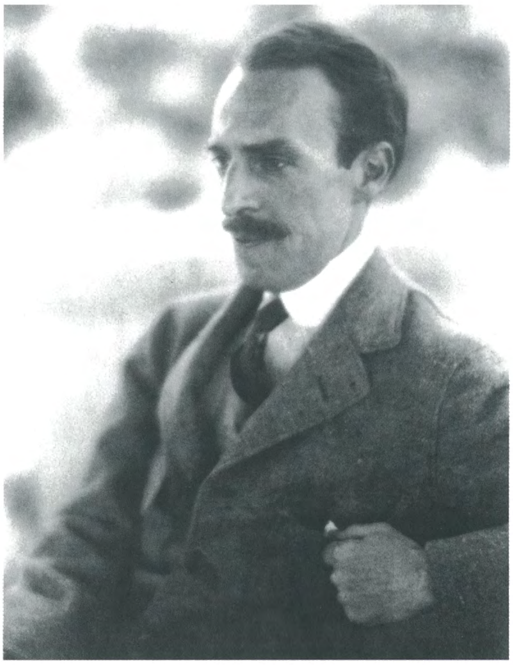


Fig. 8.115. Duncan Phillips, photographed c. 1922. Courtesy The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

Tonalism and Modernism: The Phillips Collection

> *I feel that you will not only have to have a large group of Marins but undoubtedly groups of Dove and O'Keeffe, Hartley, not to speak of my own photographs, if you really want your gallery to reflect a growth of something which is typically American and not a reflection of France or Europe.*
>
> —Alfred Stieglitz, letter to Duncan Phillips, December 11, 1926[198]

Perhaps the best test case for the continuity of Tonalism during the first half of the twentieth century exists in the formation of the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, the first major gallery in America devoted primarily to modern American art, though European art was always prominently featured as well. Duncan Phillips (1886–1966, fig. 8.115), an art writer, critic, and collector of contemporary art, amassed an extraordinary collection of American and European art between 1910 and 1966. During the 1920s he began a sustained collector-dealer relationship with Alfred Stieglitz, who was intent on guiding Phillips to assemble a collection of his artists as a way of substantiating the relevance, if not the superiority of Stieglitz's American brand of modernism in preference to his European rivals.

Phillips's birth date, while placing him firmly in the time frame of the successor generation of Tonalists born after 1865, nevertheless exposed him in his early maturity to the heyday of the primary generation of Tonalist artists, including Inness and Wyant; he was drawn to the friendship and guidance of Tonalists like J. Alden Weir, Arthur B. Davies, Robert Spencer (1879–1931), and August Tack. His life and collecting thus spans almost three generations; yet his artistic sensibility remained rooted in a turn-of-the-century respect for art as a spiritualizing power, and ultimately a subjective force for uplift in human life. Although he collected mainly modern art, Phillips never considered himself a modernist collector or advocate of modernism or of any school or style. If anything, he was a classic progressive conservative: embracing change based on tried-and-true tradition, especially when it led to new ideas, or a broadening of vision, or deepening of insight. In 1913 he condemned much of what he saw of European modernism at the Armory Show. Phillips was raised and trained in the tradition of Walter Pater and the Aesthetic movement, and thus responded to art that delighted, moved, and appealed to his senses: art as art. Phillips believed in the universal language of art that transcended time or place. True art, he always maintained, triggered deep feelings, either of recognition or escape. For fifty years he wrote about and collected the art of European and American artists that he found joy-giving and life-enhancing: in effect, an art that provided nourishment for the soul. Modernism, if it meant anything to Phillips, was simply the vital energy of change and growth. He saw modern art as developing from fifteenth-century Venetian colorists, especially the sensuous forms found in Giorgione, much in the same way Henry Ward Ranger, the leader of the Tonalist movement after 1910, saw Tonalism as an extension of the Venetian tradition of low-toned oil painting, especially the use of colored glazes to approximate atmospheric effects.

Phillips's initial forays into collecting approximate the Tonalist contingent of the 1913 Armory Show, including its main organizer, Arthur B. Davies. In 1916, Phillips began collecting the poetic landscapes of Davies, among them, *Along the Erie Canal*, 1890 (fig. 8.116), accumulating a total of twenty-eight, though he eschewed the artist's Cubist-style works. Phillips wrote extensively about Davies and the artist advised the collector on acquisitions. Phillips was early drawn to Albert Pinkham Ryder, praising his works in the Armory Show for their dreamy and mysterious poetry, and Ryder's "abstract expression of form through color" (see *Fisherman's*

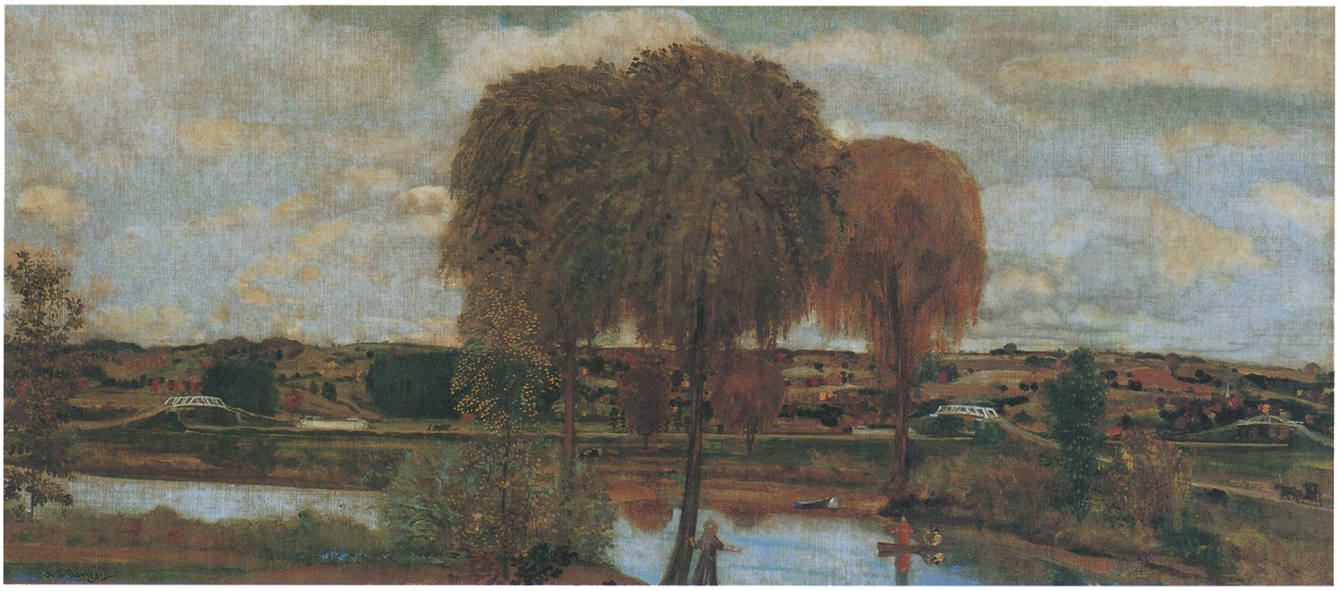


Fig. 8.116. Arthur B. Davies, *Along the Erie Canal*, 1890. Oil on canvas, 18⅛ x 20⅛ in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

Hut, undated, fig. 4.47).[199] Although late to the Ryder collecting mania, Phillips managed to acquire eight oils by the artist. Early on, he acquired two landscapes by Blakelock. Underlining his commitment to what he described as "rivers of artistic purpose" in American art, Phillips acquired works by four members of the founding generation of the Tonalist movement: Inness (four landscapes), (see fig. 4.45, *Moonlight, Tarpon Springs*, 1892), Fuller (seven oils), Whistler, and La Farge. (Among these four, only Whistler had been included by Davies in the Armory Show.) Phillips disliked Hudson River School paintings (which he knew from the walls of his childhood home) but was very much drawn to Inness, "though temporarily out of fashion," in the 1920s, because he found Inness both modern and classic, and true to his own aesthetic vision.[200] Of the primary generation of Tonalists in the Armory Show, Weir (fourteen oils), and Twachtman (four oils and two pastels) figured prominently in Phillips's early collecting, spurred in part by Phillips's friendship with Weir, who, like Davies, advised him on many of his acquisitions. Phillips acquired paintings by Bucks County Tonalists William Lathrop (three), and Robert Spencer (eight), who became a friend and adviser to Phillips in the early days of the gallery. Another Tonalist who influenced Phillips's taste and came to be represented prominently in his collection (seventy-nine works) was August Vincent Tack; the artist moved from a naturalism based on the recorded landscape (see *Cloud Wrack*, c. 1900, fig. 6.70), to almost complete abstraction based on natural forms, as in *Cloud's Edge*, circa 1935–36 (fig. 8.117). Tack's transition to pure abstraction is still another demonstration of Tonalism's underlying reliance on abstract form and the extrapolation or logic of its evolution in the hands of artists, born after 1865, who developed along modernist lines. Tack also advised Phillips on his collecting and did much to determine the course and development of the gallery in its early decades (figs. 8.118, 8.119).

Along with work by Davies, Phillips also collected other members of The Eight: Robert Henri, John Sloan, George Luks, Ernest Lawson, and Maurice Prendergast. It is significant that the early works by Lawson and Sloan bought by Phillips are distinctly tonal in feel—including Ernest Lawson's *Spring*, circa 1913 (fig. 8.120)—although the brushwork shows the looseness of Impressionist facture. Phillips's eye for the spiritual and transcendent in art ultimately led him to the Stieglitz group in 1926, and to Arthur Dove in particular, whom he supported with a stipend for many years.

Ultimately, the significance of the Phillips Collection is the consistency of style and quality of vision informing the collection. Amassed over a period of fifty years, the collection tells the story of an individual eye—a very American eye—and a taste that was traditional yet steeped in a modernist

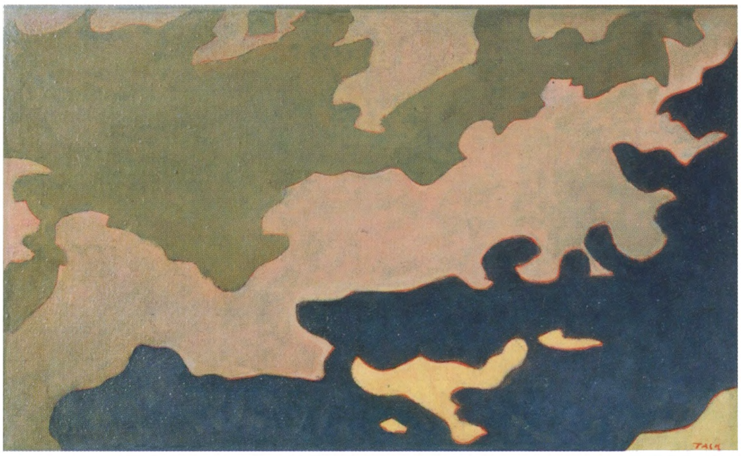


Fig. 8.117. August Vincent Tack, *Cloud's Edge*, c. 1935–36. Oil on canvas on hardboard, 24¼ x 30⅛ in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

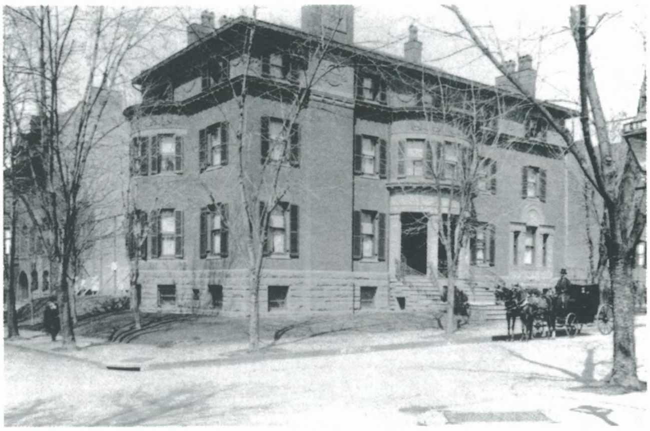


Fig. 8.118. The Main Gallery of The Phillips Collection in 1927. Courtesy The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

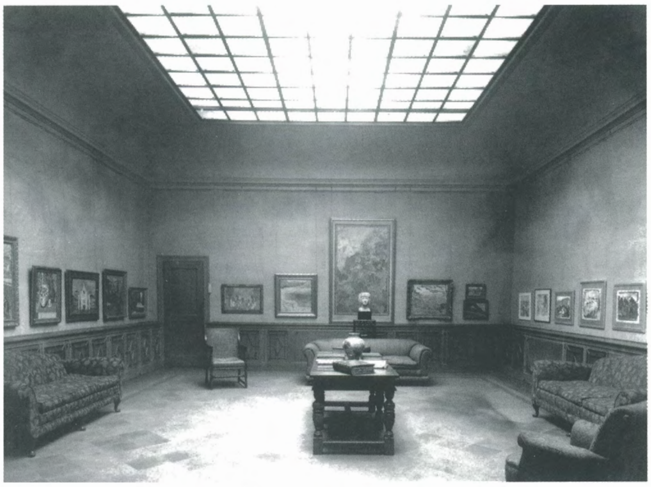


Fig. 8.119. The Phillips Collection at 21st and Q Street, c. 1900. Courtesy The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

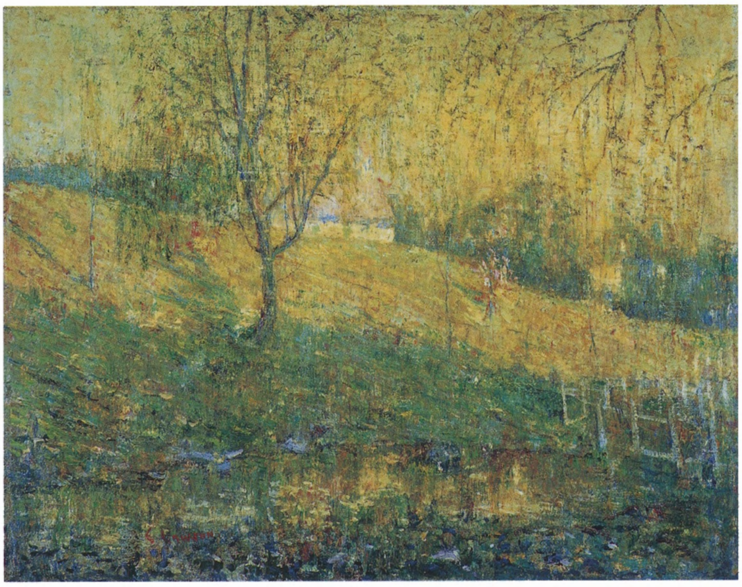


Fig. 8.120. Ernest Lawson, *Spring*, c. 1913. Oil on canvas mounted on panel, 16⅛ x 20⅛ in. Acquired 1915, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

need for something akin to existential uplift, a transporting and transcendent aesthetic experience. In addition to demonstrating the underlying continuities of the American Transcendental Romantic tradition (based on the Emersonian conviction that the spiritual element in the natural world is manifest primarily through the perceptive soul of the observant individual), the Phillips Collection portrays the ways in which the Tonalist style in its formal, abstract, and decorative strategies touched on a wide range of art, both American and European. The collection highlights the underlying affinities of artists as diverse as Inness, Whistler, Ryder, early Bonnard, Vuillard, and Odilon Redon (in 1926, Phillips built an entire exhibition around Redon's visionary art and its links to American modernists Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Augustus Tack), Marin, Hartley, as well as Dove, Paul Klee, Giorgio Morandi, Richard Diebenkorn and Milton Avery, and the Abstract Expressionists Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Clyfford Still, and Robert Motherwell. There is a family resemblance in the respect for formal values and the haunting, otherworldly symbolizations that hover in the muted (toned-down) color fields of so many canvases in the collection. One is even reminded of de Kay's discussion of Millet, who called for a requisite balance (*pondération*), or the proper relationship of light and dark values, what Millet called the very soul and body of a successful picture—the thing that grabs the attention and holds the eye.

Phillips's aesthetic approach also explains the collector's close connection to Stieglitz and his artists. Both esteemed Homer, Twachtman, and Ryder as giants of American painting.[201] In broad terms, Phillips and Stieglitz eschewed art that was distorted by political and ideological prejudices in favor of a peculiarly American sense of mystical spiritualism rooted in nature, an art that communicated in and through landscape imagery, relying on soft-edged organic forms and warm colors that intimate an underlying symbolic meaning. Neither Stieglitz nor Phillips was particular sympathetic to European modernism in its Analytic Cubist expression or any of its more cerebral, political, or even psychological (Marxist or Freudian) forms. Hard-edged geometric abstraction—abstraction disconnected from nature—as well as Social Realism and the American Scene painters, found little space in the Phillips Collection. Favored artists Dove, Hartley, Marin, and O'Keeffe were certainly touched by formalist artistic doctrines propounded by the European Symbolists, and inspired by the likes of Kandinsky's *On the Spiritual in Art*, but focused their freer expression of color on the world around them, deriving their symbolic imagery from the places they came to know and love—just as their Tonalist forbears had. John Marin's *Back of Bear Mountain*, 1925 (fig. 8.121), a culmination of the artist's early work, displays Marin's ability to draw on sources in Cubism and Fauvism but maintain the full emotional resonance of the landscape before his eyes. The

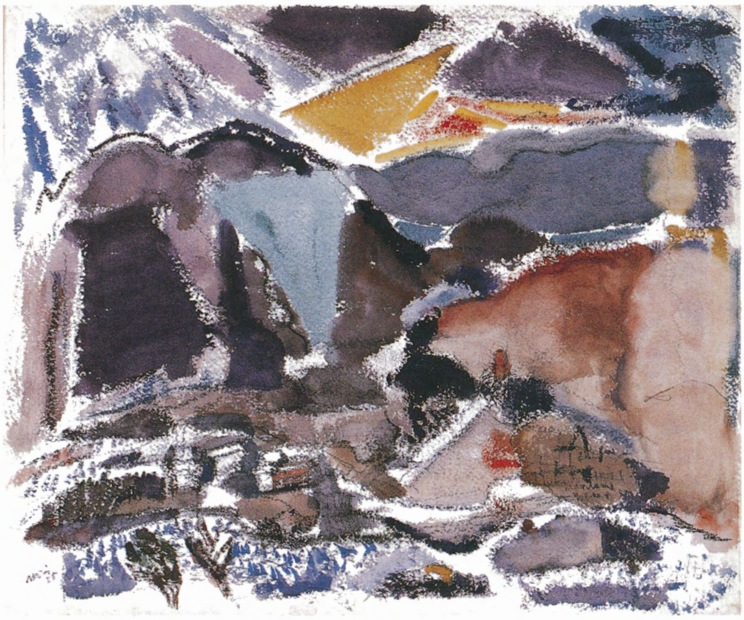


Fig. 8.121. John Marin, *Back of Bear Mountain*, 1925. Watercolor and charcoal on off-white watercolor paper, 17 x 20 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

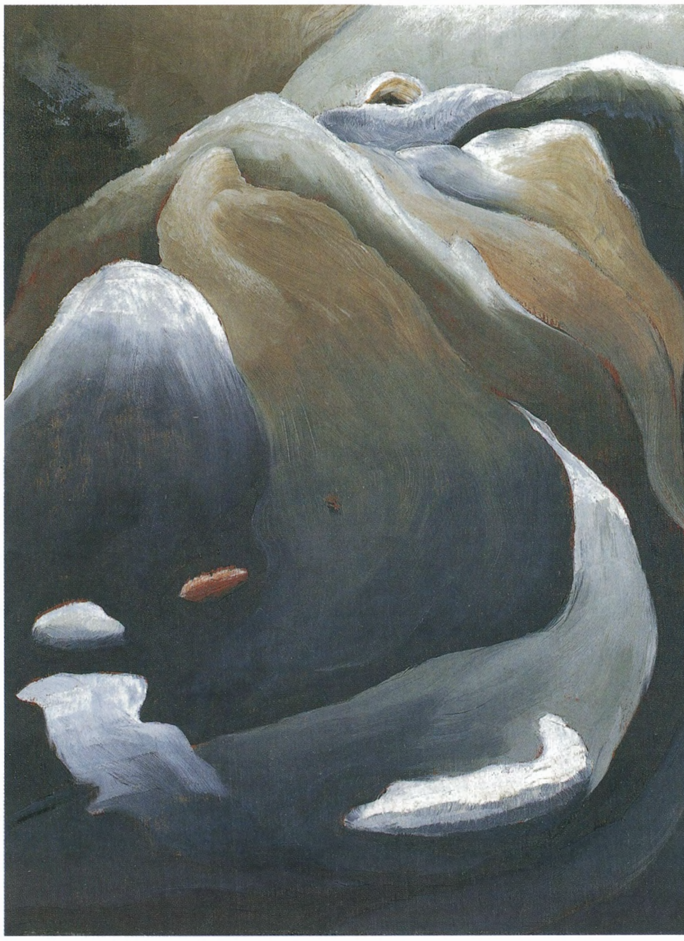


Fig. 8.122. Arthur Dove, *Waterfall*, 1925. Oil on canvas, 10 x 8 in. Acquired in 1926, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

watercolor, full of gestural brushstrokes and broad planes of pure color, manages to maintain a Tonalist feel for integrated soft-edged forms, palpable atmosphere, harmonious unity, and a personal symbolism that communicates with a distinctive expressive verve, even in the smaller format of watercolor. Marin, like most artists in the Stieglitz circle, retained an allegiance to landscape; that is, abstraction that deepened the connection to nature, as opposed to the European idea of using abstraction as a means of separating the function of art from its basis in nature.

Arthur Dove in particular drew energy and inspiration from organic form, often in a quest for the abstract essence or visual equivalent of the forces that animated Emerson's "occult" relationship between man and nature: "The best moments of life are these delicious awakenings of the higher powers" (from his essay, "Nature") *Waterfall*, 1925 (fig. 8.122), demonstrates Dove's ability to at once hold in check nature's metamorphic power and yet re-animate it in fluid and vibrant paint handling, allowing a narrow range of tones to define larger rhythms as well as the quivering surface quality of water itself. In effect, Dove took the decorative strategies of Tonalism and turned them upside down, using an inductive, quasi-scientific method to render the hidden features of the microcosm, from the cellular level on up, and the inherent intervals, repetitions, and rhythmic proportions found in the natural world.[202] His goal so mirrored that of Thoreau that Duncan Phillips wrote of the artist: "Dove is as American as Thoreau." As Dove told Phillips: "[T]he very essence of what I had found in nature [was] in the motif choice—two or three colors and two or three forms."[203]

From the Stieglitz circle artists and large holdings of Hartley, Marin, O'Keeffe, and Dove, Phillips would eventually move on to acquire important examples of work by Milton Avery and Mark Rothko (an entire gallery of the Phillips Collection would be devoted to Rothko), Philip Guston's lyrical abstractions of form and color of the 1950s, and Adolph Gottlieb's simplified color fields and floating symbols from the 1960s. In addition, Phillips collected works by the Washington Color School, associated with the Color Field movement and led by painters Morris Louis (1912–1962), Kenneth Noland (1924–2010), and Gene Davis (1920–1985), who derived their pouring-and-staining technique from the New York-based artist Helen Frankenthaler (b. 1928)—all producing soft-edged and fluid forms on unprimed canvases, thus allowing a fusion of ground and pigment with a distinctly Tonalist flavor. Morris Louis's *Blue Column*, 1960 (fig. 8.123), is reminiscent of Whistler's blue Nocturnes, though here in a vertical format, evoking a ghostly tree trunk in soft moonlight. *Black Flowers*, 1952 (fig. 8.124), by Gene Davis, pre-dates the artist's more abstract Color Field strip paintings, but demonstrates his mastery of the entire repertoire of Tonalist effects in a modernist version: soft-edged forms against a tonal backdrop of vibrant whites, the abstracting and simplifying of natural forms into bolder rhythmic patterns, many with a decorative joyfulness (the aspect Picasso hated

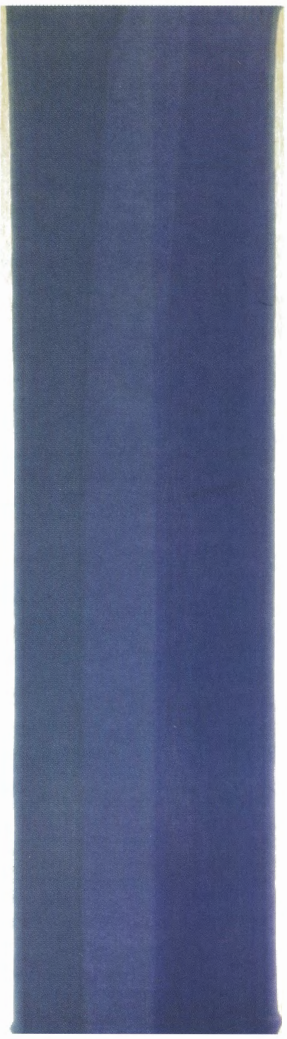


Fig. 8.123. Morris Louis, *Blue Column*, 1960. Acrylic on canvas, 80 x 72 in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

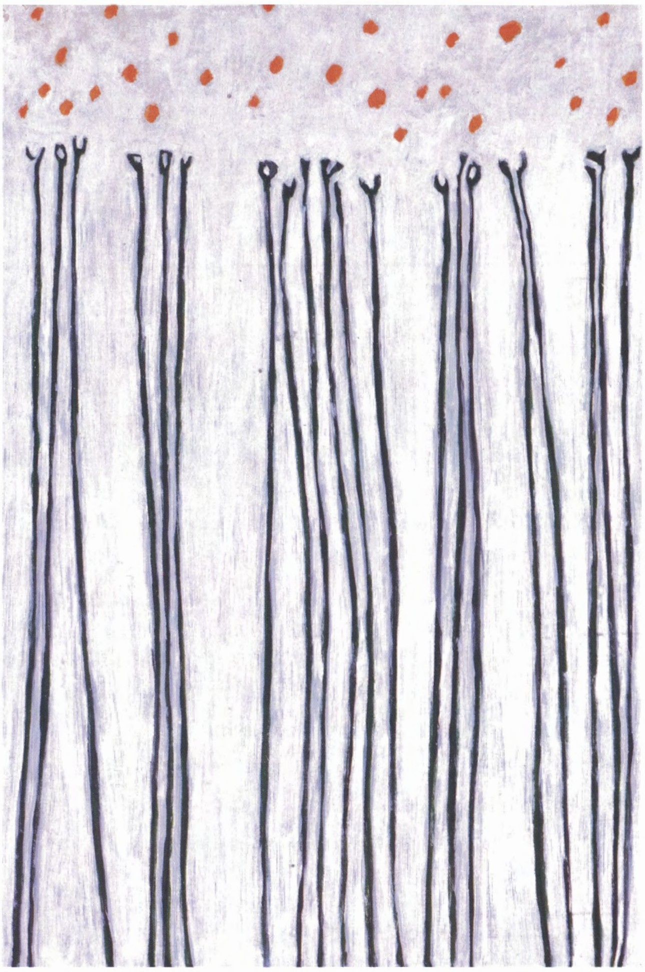


Fig. 8.124. Gene Davis, *Black Flowers*, 1952. Oil on hardboard, 36⅛ x 24¼ in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

most about pure abstraction), and the creation of symbolic shapes that resonate in the mind. One is even reminded of the foregrounds of so many early works of Aesthetic Tonalism, inevitably populated by wildflowers. Louis and Davis were artists whose abstracting sensibilities tapped into the same vein of spiritualizing symbolism found in Albert Pinkham Ryder and George Inness almost a century earlier.

It is noteworthy, too, that the techniques of the Color Field painters, often evoking the feel and texture of watercolors, not only recalls the development of more fluid watercolor styles in the 1880s and 1890s, which in turn promoted a freer handling of oils by painters of the day, but also mimics Whistler's strategies of floating his thinned pigments on canvas, allowing the ground to break through in places, either as an undertone or bare patch of canvas, so as to complement and unify his compositions. Mark Rothko was a master of such techniques, as were Helen Frankenthaler and Jules Olitski (1922–2007)—another Color Field painter—who made the overall primacy of color on canvas the focus of their art. In the 1950s, first after a summer trip to Nova Scotia, and later near her summer home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Frankenthaler developed her signature "staining" technique in which the raw unsized canvas absorbed pigment that fused tone and texture as one, creating lushly diaphanous areas of pure color suggesting the broad expanses of landscape and sea. Much as Whistler—and Jackson Pollock—had done, she often painted on a horizontal surface to enable her pigments to flow and be manipulated across the canvas. A late work by Frankenthaler, *Vernal*, 1976 (fig. 8.125), is also suggestive of landscape. Here the artist has returned to marking over thinner areas of muted color, so that her energized greens project exuberant sensations of summer's plenitude—the subtle interaction of soft-and hard-edged forms, of flat and recessional space adding to a mood both serene and joyful. By the 1960s, Olitski had moved on from his earlier staining technique, evolving a method of spraying his canvases with overlapping acrylic tones that bleed imperceptibly one into another, or serve as luminous grounds that break through the surface color like the sea through mist, setting up precisely the sense of vibration and refraction that Whistler and the Tonalist painters had developed a century before. His *Juno*, 1968 (fig. 8.126), wonderfully displays the exquisite ambiguities that have always given tonal painting its haunting and mysterious allure, here evoking an astral view of outer space, or even a sunset over the sea, with Olitski's

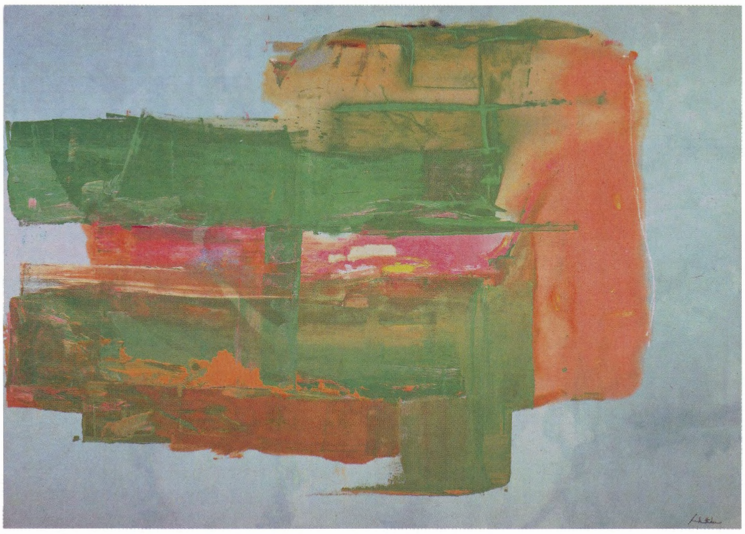


Fig. 8.125. Helen Frankenthaler, *Vernal*, 1976. Acrylic on canvas, 90 x 126 in. Courtesy Knoedler & Company, New York.

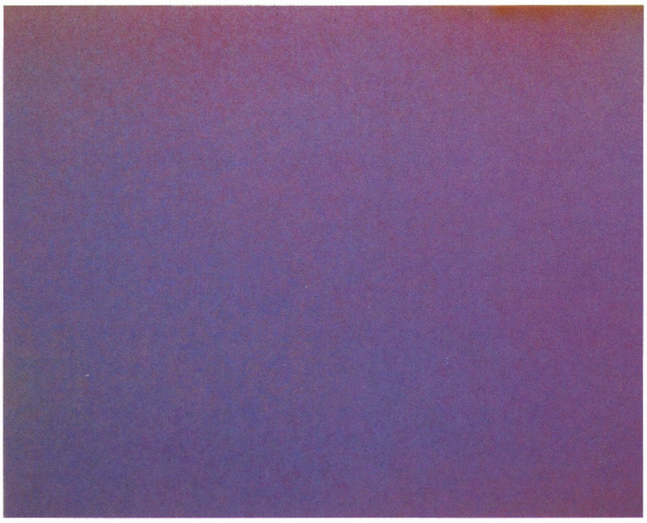


Fig. 8.126. Jules Olitski, *Juno*, 1968. Acrylic on canvas, 44½ x 57½ in. Courtesy Knoedler & Company, New York.

characteristic lines of acrylic impasto along the bottom edge and sides, offering the possibility of schematic landforms or even a beach to the inquisitive eye. Together with the works in the Phillips Collection, these paintings by Frankenthaler and Olitski preserve and illuminate the continuities in the Tonalist mode of American art from the 1880s through the 1960s.

The Third Generation: Tonalists Born after 1865 and the Passing of the Torch

The continuities reflected in the Phillips Collection were clearly visible in American art throughout the twentieth century in the works of innovative artists born after 1865, who did not fall into easy categories of modernist development. Artists whose birth date fell between 1865 and 1885 would have experienced the height of the Tonalist movement in their twenties, and most likely would have adopted the style in the early part of their careers, before modifying it or moving on to related or completely different styles as they matured. As has been seen, the signature style that John Marin, Marsden Hartley, Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, and others in the Stieglitz circle evolved in the first decades of the twentieth century continued to serve them well. Among members of The Eight, Robert Henri, Arthur B. Davies, and Ernest Lawson employed a Tonalist palette to the end of their working lives. Hundreds if not thousands of other artists not necessarily associated with American modernism used formalist aspects of Tonalism in their work right up to World War II and beyond.

The extraordinary Tonalist nocturnes of Leon Dabo (1868–1960), including *The Calm*, circa 1906 (fig. 8.127; see also fig. 3.75, *Gray Poplars*, 1912; fig. 8.110.1, *Evening North Sierra*, 1912; and fig. 8.110.2, *Canadian Night*, c. 1912), were a sensationin the turn-of-the-century art world. Perhaps no other third-generation Tonalist extrapolated the heritage of La Farge and Whistler with such extraordinary success, creating works of decorative and spiritual abstraction that became icons of their age. Born to French parents, Dabo trained under both La Farge in New York and Whistler in London; his father, Ernest Dabo, had been a colleague and friend of Whistler in the 1850s. Leon Dabo's vaporous and exquisitely modulated tonalities evoking scintillating river views along the Hudson and Hackensack rivers, often with vaulting azure cloud formations, were received with rapturous critical reviews on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1908, Dabo won the William T. Evans prize at the National Arts Club (most likely with the blessing of Charles de Kay) for *Evening on the Hudson* (1907–1908, Smithsonian American Art Museum), beginning a string of major prizes both at home and abroad. Dabo showed with the "The Eight" at the "Independents" exhibit of 1910, and was a principle organizer, along with Arthur B. Davies, of the 1913 Armory show, where he presented four works.

Dabo's brand of ethereal and Expressive Tonalism, imbued with Symbolist overtones, was a virtual international style by 1910, and yet another indicator of how Whistler's aura still infused modernist circles at this time. Wrote Sadakichi Hartmann of Dabo in 1906, "The highest quality in Dabo's work is the result of inner, not outer vision, denoting less the painter's eye for difference than the seer's eye for the analogy of pictorial and psychological phenomena . . . Leon Dabo has discarded all facile lures of brushwork, all technical interpolation from his art. He merely tries to translate into tone some passages from the book of nature, ever careful to fuse thought and color, as to win the esteem of all searchers for truth and beauty."[204] Four years later in 1910, J. Nilsen Laurvik, art critic of the *New York Times*, included Dabo in a select group of imaginative landscape painters who, so the critic wrote, had created a uniquely American style of art, ". . . those dreamers of fine dreams who abstract from the concrete facts of every-day life somewhat of

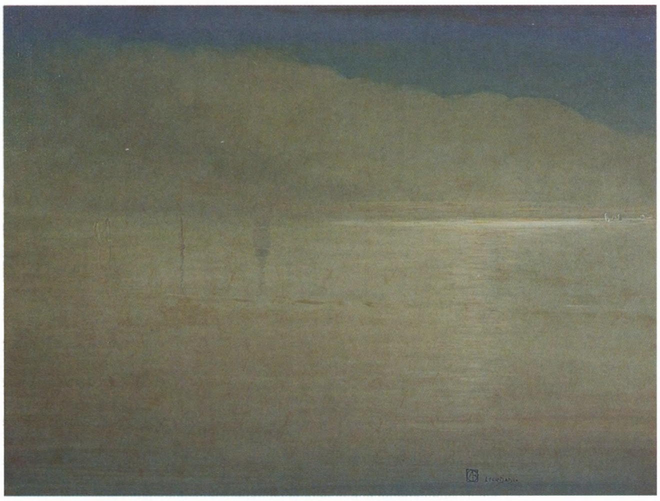


Fig. 8.127. Leon Dabo, *The Calm*, c. 1906. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. The O'Brien Collection of American Art, Sewickley, PA.

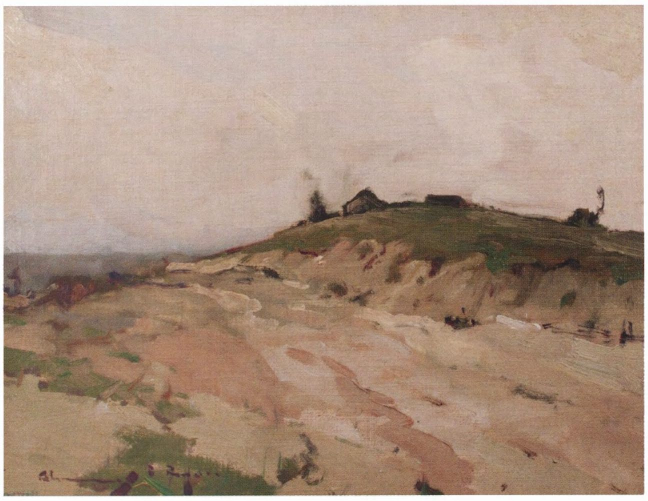


Fig. 8.128. Chauncey Ryder, *Misty Hills*, c. 1915. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

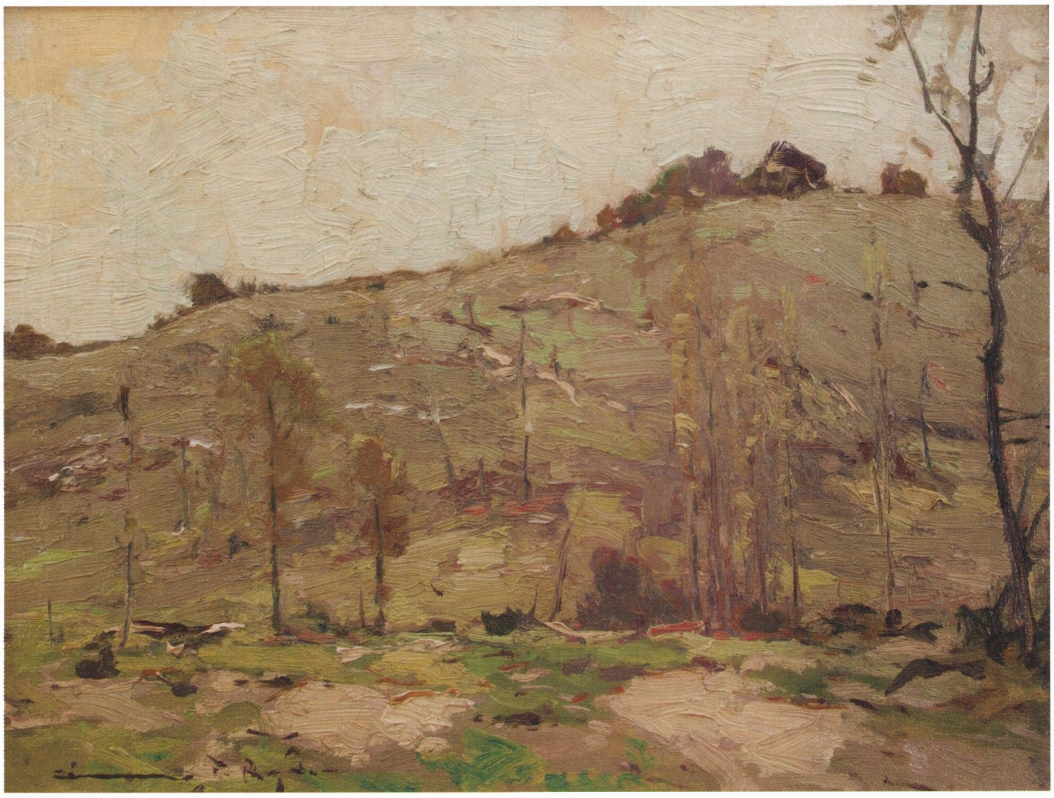


Fig. 8.129. Chauncey Ryder, *Sunny Hillside*, c. 1915. Oil on canvas, 12 x 16 in. Private collection.

its poetry, something of its ineffable beauty and elusive mystery . . . [who] render up the intimate and evasive spirit of things . . . to make visible these secret laws by means of line and color—that would seem to be the highest function of the landscape painter."[205] Dabo's crisp, stylized, and simplified marines and river views inspired by his idol, Whistler, display a fervent feel for fluid forms and lush paint textures and modulated tones, along with an exquisite sensitivity to variations in light and color. Later, Dabo would move to a more expressive handling of thick impasto.

Chauncey Ryder (1868–1949), born the same year as Dabo, kept a studio in Paris until 1910, but returned to America in 1907 to begin exhibiting with Macbeth Gallery. Like so many of his generation, Ryder made the transition from Whistler-inspired Tonalism around 1903 (see *French Landscape*, fig. 4.16) to a more broadly brushed and expressive facture, which he elaborated on throughout his long career. Ryder's stylized landforms and decorative tree lines, exemplified by *Misty Hills* (fig. 8.128) and *Sunny Hillside* (fig. 8.129), both from around 1915, demonstrate the painter's flair for rhythm and pattern in his sumptuous use

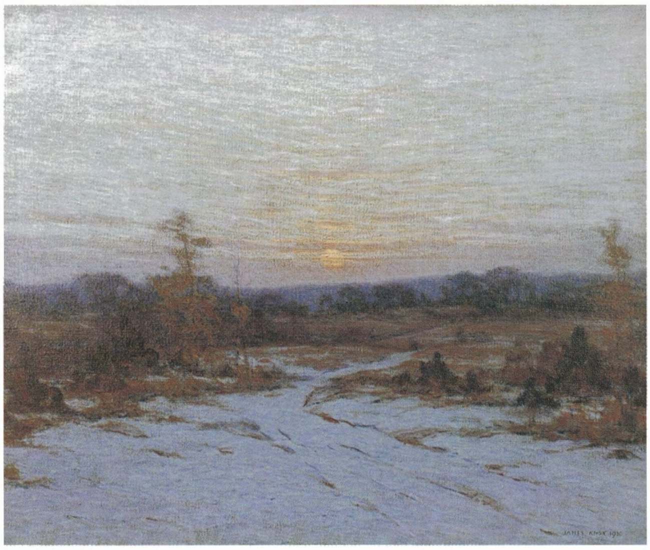


Fig. 8.130. James Knox, *Sunset Snow*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 25 x 30 in. Private collection.

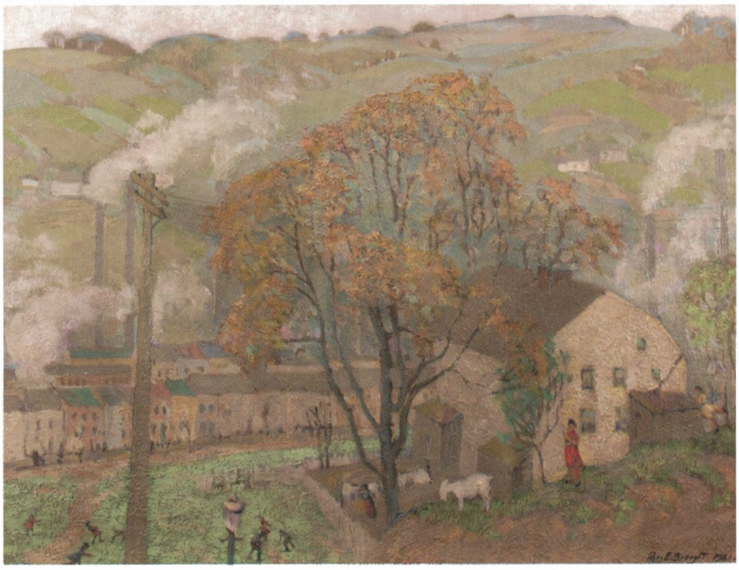


Fig. 8.132. Ross Braught, *Manayunk*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 in. Private collection.

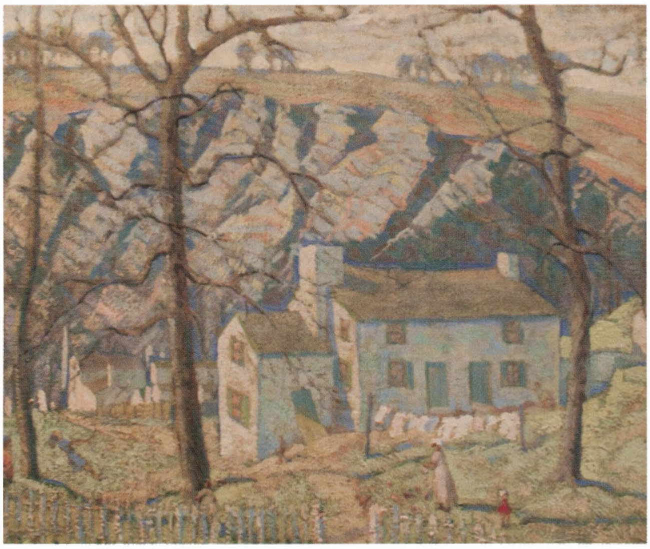


Fig. 8.131. Ross Braught, *Blue Ridge*, c. 1921. Oil on canvas, 30 x 35 in. Private collection.

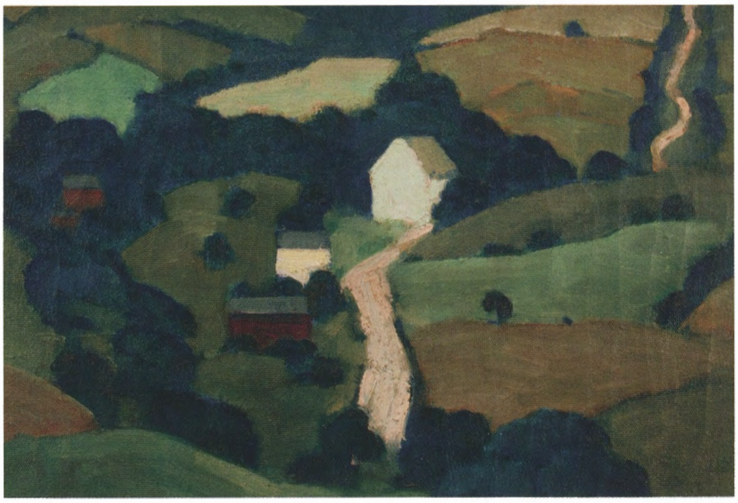


Fig. 8.133. Ross Braught, *Hilly Roads*, c. 1925. Oil on canvas, 11 x 15 in. Private collection.

of impasto, which seems to generate a kind of kinetic energy—visual and tactile—throughout the composition. Ryder spent most of his time in Wilton, New Hampshire, and his distinctive style and penchant for dazzling green tonalities gained him a wide following. The forgotten James Knox (1866–1942) painted lush and captivating landscapes into the 1930s—among them, *Sunset Snow*, 1930 (fig. 8.130)—employing a modified Pointillist facture, resulting in an otherworldly feel for broken light and sensuous form. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1950s, the gifted artist and teacher, Ross Braught (1898–1983), was adapting the Tonalist palette to instill a warm and vibrant touch in his landscapes painted along the Delaware River near New Hope, and later in Woodstock, the American West, and by the late 1940s, in Dutch Guiana. In such works as *Blue Ridge*, 1921 (fig. 8.131), *Manayunk*, 1922 (fig. 8.132), *Hilly Roads*, circa 1925 (fig. 8.133), and *Blue Hills*, circa 1928 (fig. 8.134), Braught captured a quality that many in the Stieglitz circle well understood: the way in which a dominant tonality gives emotional depth, elucidates landform patterns and rhythms, and unifies the composition. Ralph Wickiser (1910–1998), born twelve years later than Braught, moved from realism in the 1930s to various forms of abstraction in the 1950s (*Red*, 1954, fig. 8.135), eventually moving to an abstract realism informed by the spiritual temperament of soft-edged Tonalism in the late 1970s through the 1990s. *Floating Leaves II*, 1983 (fig. 8.136), again demonstrates the persistence of the Tonalist style through the twentieth century—if not its historical continuity, then certainly the style's technical methodology and subtle engagement with human sensibilities that had so entranced artists going back to the Venetian masters.

If there was a last hurrah for Tonalism as a historic movement, or perhaps a valedictory moment, it well may

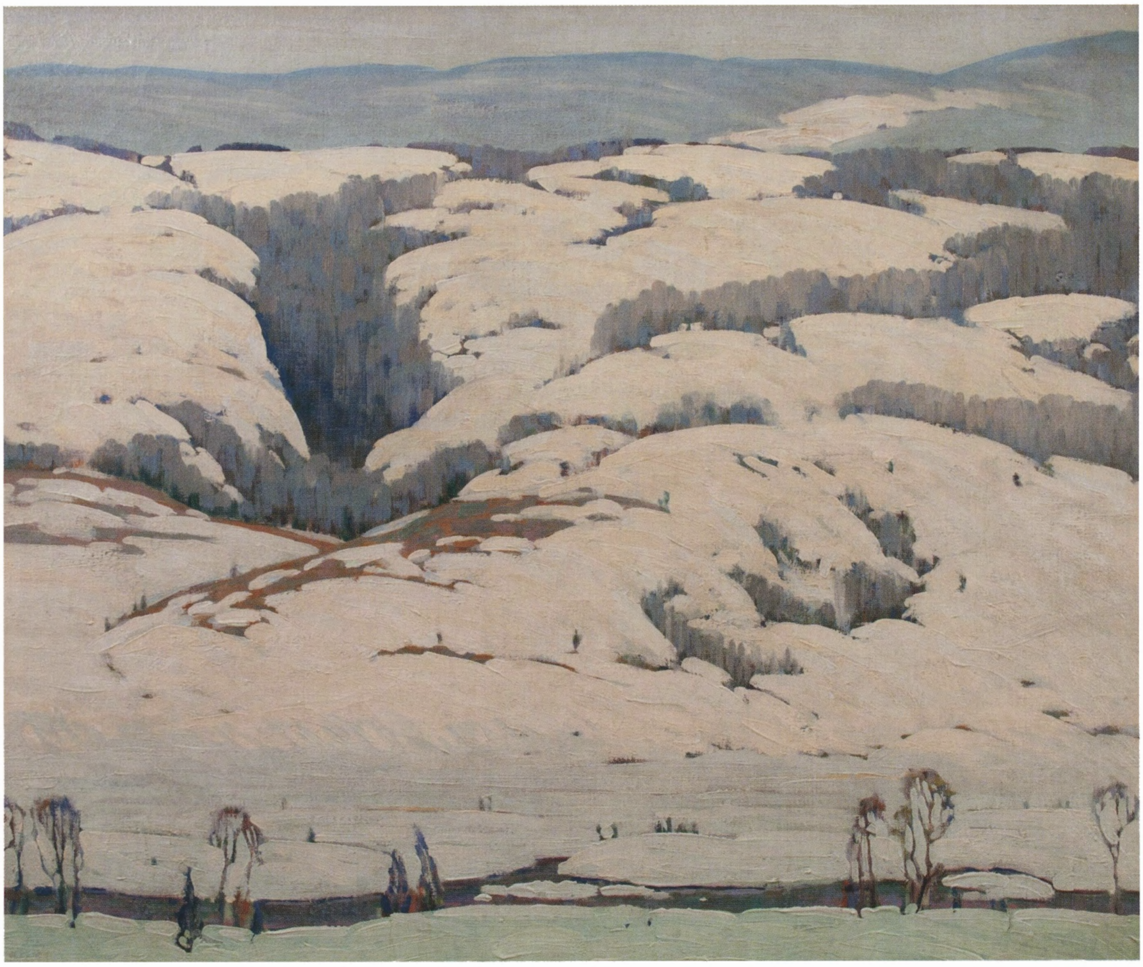


Fig. 8.134. Ross Braught, *Blue Hills*, c. 1928. Oil on canvas, 30 x 34 in. Private collection.

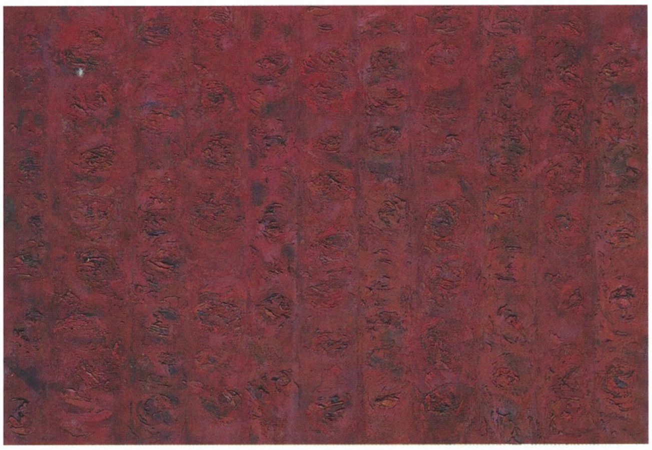


Fig. 8.135. Ralph Wickiser, *Red*, 1954. Oil and mixed media on canvas, 50 x 72 in. Courtesy Walter Wickiser Gallery, New York.

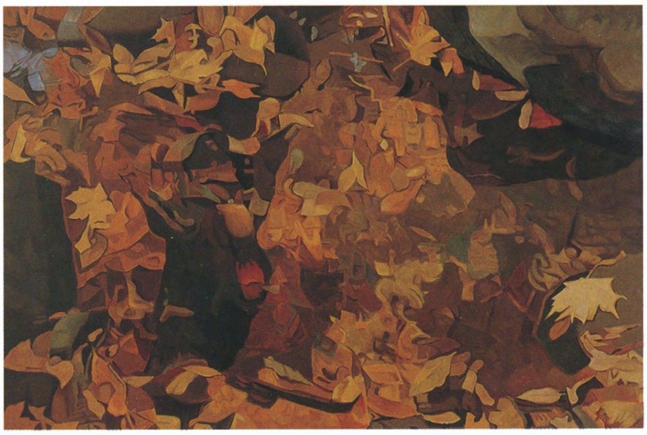


Fig. 8.136. Ralph Wickiser, *Floating Leaves II*, 1983. Oil on linen, 40 x 60 in. Private collection.

have been the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. This huge showing of international art marking San Francisco's recovery from the devastating earthquake of 1906 included a comprehensive retrospective of American art, and combined the rising talents of the third generation of Tonalists—and their realist colleagues of every stripe—with the greats of the Tonalist movement, ranging from George Inness, Homer Dodge Martin, Alexander Wyant, and James McNeill Whistler to Frank Duveneck, who had a gallery to himself, as did John Henry Twachtman. Henry Muhrman had six pastels on display and J. Alden Weir and Dwight Tryon dominated another gallery, while Charles Harold Davis and Leonard Ochtman were also well represented. Above all, Whistler, with a large group of his historic works on display, remained—perhaps for the last time in a major exhibition—the reigning star in the American firmament.

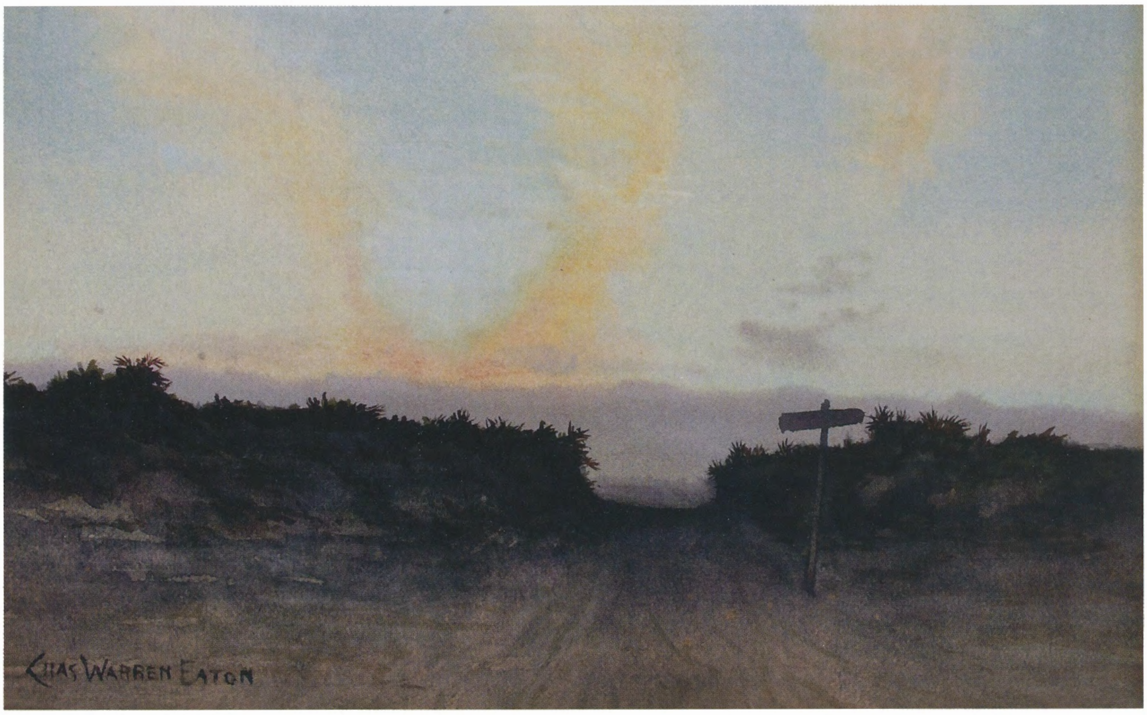


Fig. 8.137. Charles Warren Eaton, *Twilit Road*, c. 1910. Watercolor, 9 x 15 in. Private collection.

On the jury of the Panama-Pacific Exposition was Joseph Pennell, a medal winner and *hors concours*, with an entire room given over to his etchings and lithographs; his fame as an illustrator and Tonalist printmaker was at its height. He had been a close friend and biographer of Whistler. A decade later, after four years of hellish war, things looked very different. Reflecting on his life a few years before his death in 1926, Pennell wrote of himself and his generation of Tonalists (gazing out his Brooklyn Heights window at New York's fast-changing skyline): "I had had my sight of War and felt and knew the wreck and ruin of War, the wreck of my life and my home—and that has never left me since, nor millions of others over there who went through it and will never recover from it, for the memory of it is always with them. . . . But the world is ruined; for those who were in it, though scarce any here know it, it was the beginning of the end of all. Remember Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome. We do not remember, we do not think, we do not know. . . . But I can never forget what I saw and suffered, and I suffer still when I see the old world jazzing through its ruins . . . And now I am home, but not in my own home, not in the land I left and knew and loved and dreamed of coming home to. But it is good to have lived, to have adventured, to have known, and to remember."[206]

The distemper of Pennell can be partly explained by professional frustrations. *The Century Magazine*, for which he illustrated and his wife wrote, and which had fervently promoted him and the Tonalist movement for decades, had ceased to print illustrations in favor of photography. But the edge of irony and impatience, of longing and muted sadness, was endemic to members of his generation whose lives were bracketed by the scars of conflict and rapid change. Perhaps Pennell was lucky not to have survived into the 1930s and the Great Depression, as many in his generation did, only to find their art dismissed and their declining years brought to a pitiful state by a moribund art market. Charles Warren Eaton, who died in 1937, lived to see his reputation go into eclipse and his paintings, even his masterful watercolors (such as *Twilit Road*, c. 1910, fig. 8.137), become almost unsellable. To pay bills toward the end of his life, he was forced to sell an Inness he owned. William Macbeth, Eaton's dealer for more than forty years, wrote in a memorial essay, "He was content to express in his own personal way the things in nature that appealed to him . . . he painted with the full knowledge of his craft and with an affection that is evident in his ability to transmit his feeling to others."[207] The transmission of feeling, first espoused by Inness, remained the core precept of the Tonalist movement, linking one generation to the next.

Perhaps the best obituary for members of the Tonalist generation who lingered into the 1930s is captured in Henry White's poignant closing of his 1930 biography of Dwight Tryon. White, a landscape Tonalist and only a few years younger than Tryon, had hoped that the Concord authors and the Tonalist artists had laid the foundations for a great future in American art: "But as Lewis Mumford has so plainly demonstrated, the age of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, of Hawthorne and Herman Melville, was our Golden Day in literature. It is a closed incident. And, by inference, and from our observation of the aberrant laws, if laws they are, that govern the appearance and disappearance of periods of artistic activity and accomplishment, it would seem safe to predict that considerable time will elapse before America again produces artists of the stature of Thayer and La Farge, of Whistler, Dewing, and Tryon, of Wyant, Inness, and Martin, of Ryder and Homer. Rodin, commenting on our art of the seventies and eighties, said, 'America has had a Renaissance, but America doesn't know it.' But while we do not know what the future holds, we can say, with Whistler, 'We have then but to wait—until, with the mark of the gods upon him, there come among us again the chosen, who shall continue what has gone before. Satisfied that, even were he never to appear, the story of the beautiful is already complete. . . .' So we may, for the present, rest content, thankful for what is already a rich heritage of beauty left us by these men."[208]

Tonalism and the Great Depression: Years in the Wilderness

He [Albert Ryder] had the great gift of knowing how to put tone to tone. That's hard to do—and maybe that's why he's had so few direct followers. . . . Look at Ryder's designs. They fit like gears . . . it all interlocks.

—Walt Kuhn[209]

Fifteen years after the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, everything had changed. In the 1932 Museum of American Art exhibition, *American Painting and Sculpture, 1862–1932*, only an echo remained of the high tide of Tonalism. The Great Depression has taken its toll. Inness, Martin, and Wyant were included and their synthetic landscapes, "achieved through tonalism and atmospheric treatment," are praised, in the catalogue essay by Holger Cahill, the art historian, curator, and later director of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), although he comments that they are not up to the level of their English or French contemporaries. Whistler and Ryder are included but it is noted that Whistler never lived in America and so is suspect, "his rendering of tone organization, and his modification of the Japanese mode of line and local tone, have ceased to be of importance to contemporary painters," while Ryder, although hailed as "the visionary of American art, but his vision was crystal clear," is further described as a lone recluse out of step with the mainstream of his time. Cahill also deploys a Marxist commentary to explain the artistic failings of an era, comprised of solitaries, like Ryder, and expatriates. "The artist was outside society. Isolation was not good for the artist. Without work to do for the community he is thrown back into the exploitation of personal peculiarities, into bohemianism, and defiance. He is a member of the social body cut off from the general circulation. No profession can maintain its health under such conditions. . . . In the so-called Gilded Age the split between the artist and the public was nearly complete." And, so Cahill goes on to note: "Whistler has suffered a temporary eclipse because art today is not much concerned with the problems which interested him." Weir, Twachtman, Davies, and Blakelock are included and lauded, as was Ryder, for his visionary and romantic imagery, and "handling of tone and pattern."[210]

Cahill's rejection of artists lacking interest in social justice or those preoccupied with aesthetic issues and personal vision to the detriment of social utility, may well have echoed attitudes that pushed the Tonalists into deeper ill repute than even the onslaught of European modernism. Artists like Ryder and Twachtman, who were considered outsiders or rebels, retained some staying power among curators and academic historians—as did Homer because of his origins in popular illustration—while the reality of their lives and art, deeply rooted in the culture of their day, as well as the breadth of the progressive Tonalist movement of which they part, was lost. For the generation of critics whose ideas were shaped by the Great Depression, pure landscape retained no political or social value. Cahill summed up the decline in 1934 with another Museum of Modern Art publication, *Art in America in Modern Times*: "We are living in a time of conscious and critical revaluation, of profound readjustments. In the depression art seems more a luxury than ever, the artist more divorced from life. And there are no avenues of escape. . . . The Olympus of the observer, detached from the actualities of daily living, has been blasted out of existence. Art for art's sake is a tattered banner which has blown down the wind. There is no health in introspection. The cultivation of sensibility has become a blind alley. . . . The one clear note in contemporary American painting is a new emphasis upon social and collective expression. Subject and 'human interest' have definitely been reinstated in art. . . . Once more man is the most interesting subject of the artist. The impact of the present moment in all its tragedy and confusion, its bewildering surfaces and its disturbing emotional quality has forced upon the artist a concern with the problems of human society."[211] As has been seen, Cahill's frame of reference remained very much in force when art historians and critics began reassessing the Armory Show in the early 1950s and 1960s: the Tonalists, individually and as a group, had almost entirely disappeared from academic discussion, and when they were mentioned, they were dismissed as epigoni of the French Barbizon school.

What Cahill and, later, Alfred Barr failed to understand was that while they were thoroughly dismissed by 1930, the Tonalists were not entirely forgotten; their methods and sources of inspiration had passed into the work of a new generation of modernists, and would reappear in a new guise in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The legacy of the Armory Show of 1913, the self-doubt that was the result of a renewed reverence for European artists, along with political battles on the left and right promoting socially relevant art that depictied either the injustices faced by the worker or the wholesomeness of the American heartland, made the forging of a new American style all the more fraught. Not unlike the generation of American artists in the late 1870s, many of whom were trained in Europe and tethered to academic and genre traditions of European art, the Abstract Expressionists, like Rothko and Pollock, who matured during the Great Depression, had to overcome the weight of European modernism—Picasso, Matisse, and Cézanne—as well as Surrealism (with its attendant focus on the collective unconscious, Freud, primitivism, myth, dreams, and so forth), and Cubism, while negotiating their way past lingering prewar ideologies that insisted on art's role in the struggle for human justice. No generation of American artists was as exquisitely self-conscious—and resentful—of its debts and ties to Europe as that of Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Willem de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman, nor so determined to shed European influence and reclaim the limelight for itself and American art.

These artists' awareness of the modernist tradition of the avant-garde and the tropes of a self-selected avant-garde, ever present and in tantalizing proximity for New York artists on the walls of the Museum of Modern Art, made their attempts at formulating a distinctive style of modern American art booby-trapped with self-conscious imitation. They knew all the tricks of the modernist trade: the signature styles, the cachet of association with Matisse or Cézanne (Fauvism or Cubism)—though they avoided a servile dependence on either—the publicity angle and the dissemination of artistic manifestos, and, of course, the consolidation of a group aesthetic and cultural stance in the face of some prevailing official doctrine or policy of discrimination against the avant-garde. After all, the artistic vanguard, by definition, required the opposition of the bourgeoisie. By the late 1940s, all this was available—with one exception—that most elusive of all things: a distinctive new style. For better or worse, the Abstract Expressionists had Clement Greenberg, but vastly more important, they had the art and defiant stance of Milton Avery, to see them through the birth pangs of what many believed to be the first truly American international style.

The Tonalist Heritage and the Development of Abstract Expressionism: Milton Avery, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock

This conviction of greatness, the feeling that one was in the presence of great events, was immediate on encountering his work. . . . Avery is first a great poet. His is the poetry of sheer loveliness, of sheer beauty. . . . This—alone—took great courage in a generation which felt that it cold be heard only through clamor, force and a show of power. . . . There have been several others in our generation who have celebrated the world around them, but none with the inevitability where the poetry penetrates every pore of the canvas to the very last tip of the brush. For Avery was a great poet inventor who invented sonorities never seen nor heard before. From these we have learned much and will learn more for a long time to come.

—Mark Rothko[212]

Milton Avery (1855–1965) moved the Tonalist heritage a long way toward its inherent logic of simplification and near total abstraction. Exploiting all of Tonalism's technical and aesthetic components, adding a touch of Matisse's Fauvist whimsy, a nod to the American vernacular, and a fillip of his own brand of wry ironic humor, he produced landscapes of visionary purity and Whistlerian ethereality. Avery's work set the stage for the ascendancy of American art in the latter part of the twentieth century. As Whistler, Inness, La Farge, and Currier had galvanized the American art world of the late 1870s, so Avery's reinterpretation of the underlying abstract and symbolic essence of the indigenous Tonalist tradition in the 1940s inspired his friends and followers: in the sublime dematerialized landscapes of Rothko, or the stark and haunting symbolizations of Adolph Gottlieb and the essential geometric truths embodied in Barnett Newman's elegiac "zip" paintings. In addition, he laid the groundwork for the work of William Baziotes, Theodore Stamos, and the Color Field painters, and certainly for postmodern Tonalists like Wolf Kahn.

Writing in the 1950s and 1960s, the critic and champion of Abstract Expressionism, Clement Greenberg, saw Avery, along with John Marin, Marsden Hartley, and Arthur Dove, as progenitors of a distinctive kind of American modernism, employing abstraction as a means, but retaining a fundamental attachment to the world as an end. According to Greenberg, "Avery's is the opposite of what is supposed to be a typical American attitude in that he approaches nature as a subject rather than as an object. One does not manipulate a subject, one *meets* it."[213] Greenberg proclaimed Avery the greatest colorist of his generation, and while not displacing the stars of pure abstractionism, Pollock and Rothko, Avery, in Greenberg's evolving estimation, had touched on some essential bedrock that was indispensable to American art. For the later generation of Color Field painters, including Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler, and later Wolf Kahn, Avery was the fountainhead of postmodern Tonalism. Contemporary critic Hilton Kramer calls Avery's late landscapes "among the greatest paintings ever produced by an American artist," displaying Avery's "uncanny affinity for pure painting."[214] It is not surprising, given the underlying spiritual vision of Avery's work, that the artist's first major one-man museum exhibition was held at the Phillips Collection in 1944.

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1885, twenty years after the outside date of the second or core generation of Tonalists, Avery had been old enough—he was twenty in 1905—to

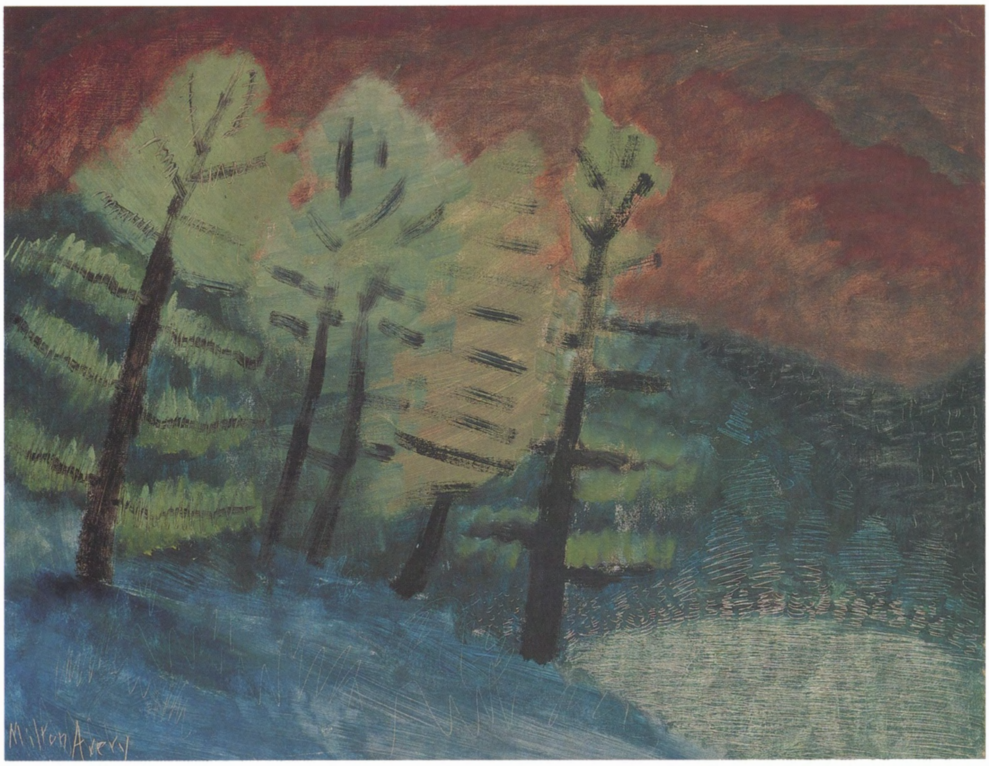


Fig. 8.138. Milton Avery, *Trees*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 28 x 36 in. Acquired 1952, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

experience firsthand the apogee of Tonalism, its slow fade in the face of European modernism, and the revival of a more vigorous realist tradition in American art. When Avery worked at blue-collar jobs in the Hartford area early on as an art student, he was inspired by the late expressive Tonalism of artists like John Henry Twachtman, J. Alden Weir, and J. Francis Murphy, a tradition that infused his early work. Avery's oil sketches from the 1920s display his absorption and mastery of the Tonalist style, notably the technical refinements of vibration and refraction of tones (cool color painted over a warm ground, and the juxtaposition of complementary tones) taught by Birge Harrison in his widely read book on landscape painting. Avery's biographer, Robert Hobbs, observes, "This way of integrating hues of roughly the same value was to become important for Avery later in his career when he used saturated colors in unusual combinations."[215] In his early work, Avery emphasized broad masses and employed dominant hues throughout his composition. Hobbs writes, "Before he moved to New York in 1925, Avery's art manifested those qualities idealized by late nineteenth-century American Impressionists and Tonalists: refinement, tradition, evocative subjects taken from nature, and an emphasis on brushwork to indicate spontaneity and to characterize a specific mood."[216] These are the essential ingredients of Avery's tonal poetry and deep feeling for atmospheric light: the serene connection to nature that would find its apotheosis in the artist's greatest landscapes of the 1950s.

Certainly the most extraordinary thing about Avery—the vital center of the enduring power of his art—is his fundamental sincerity and purity of vision. Avery was a rarity among American artists in the tumultuous years of the 1930s and 1940s; he was able to maintain his core integrity, and so preserve and enlarge the scope of his underlying inspiration in the face of modernist inveiglements—the Scylla and Charybdis of Fauvism and Cubism in particular, and the tantalizing lure of Surrealism—and the ever-present polemical invectives that raged in the New York art world of the time. He slowly broke down the Tonalist template of complementary forms and colors, and decorative patterning and, in a sense, reverse-engineered the style by weaving together its component parts into a purified and dramatic construct, retaining much of the style's lambent atmospheric planes and haunting spirit while keeping intact the formal foundation of the style (see *Trees*, 1936 fig. 8.138). Avery's maintenance of a structure of interlocking values resulted in both a coherent whole and the preservation of a palpable and distinctive feeling of atmosphere, even as his style evolved into a more planar, two-dimensional setting. The resulting tension—and Avery had a genius for dead reckoning in his deployment of color tones to create the illusion of recession in flat space—between recessional and non-recessional space was a masterstroke.

Few artists in the 1930s and 1940s managed, or cared to manage, such painterly sleight-of-hand. Although he applied his refined sensibility to both figurative and landscape work,

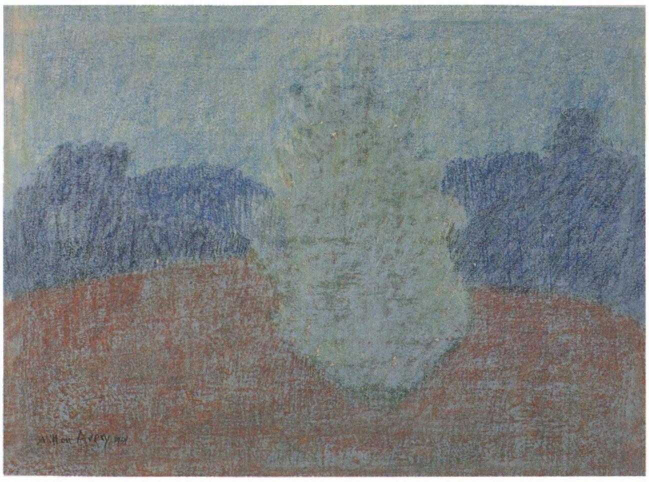


Fig. 8.139. Milton Avery, *Morning Landscape*, 1954. Watercolor, pastel, gouache, and wax crayon on paper, 22½ x 31 in. Acquired 1956, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

the underlying formal attributes of the Tonalist style (long adapted to the depiction of organic form in the landscape), were more conducive and so more successfully used in his landscape work, where Avery's emotional response to sea and sky resonates most fully. The late landscapes in particular, which seemed to spur the reappraisal of Avery by Clement Greenberg in the 1950s, were hypnotic in their strange spare poetry (for example, *Morning Landscape*, 1954, fig. 8.139)—so oddly spiritual in an age of secular ideologies. In a dyspeptic era of wars hot and cold, Avery tapped into an unrequited yearning. This quasi-religious and poetic dimension, though thoroughly modern, had its antecedents in the homespun Emersonian-Romantic tradition of Ryder, and its Whistlerian counterpart in the Symbolist movement.

The laconic Avery, who rarely let on to his passionate attachments, was an enthusiastic reader of modern poetry and was familiar with the work of the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who insisted that poetry, like form and color in painting, was simply about the arrangement of words, not ideas or narrative. This fundamentally turn-of-the-century stance toward art, elucidated by William Morris Hunt and Whistler, remained firm throughout Avery's career. It partially explains Avery's ingrained ability to evolve a natural symbolization—the forms and colors in nature—out of the landscapes he loved, crucially, his 1938 watercolors of the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec, and later in Gloucester and other vacation retreats. The artist's felicitous response to simplified pattern-form in nature, as in *Sand Spit*, 1959 (fig. 8.140), allowed Avery to finesse the convoluted struggles of so many of his modernist colleagues. His friends Mark Rothko, Alfred Gottlieb, and Barnett Newman, all twenty or so years younger, agonized for decades as they tried to develop similar symbolizations that offered integrity of meaning and visceral energy (subject, style, and aesthetic stance) out of their conflicted ambitions to forge a modern American art: a template for a mode of abstraction that might unite them yet express their personal anxieties and sense of tragedy. In effect, their search for some kind of collective unconscious was ineluctably marked by the literary and philosophical effusions of Freud, Jung, Bergson, and Nietzsche, the ever-lurking demons of European influence.

Avery's quiet confidence, bolstered by his Yankee equanimity that made him indifferent to influence, served him magnificently. It wasn't that Avery didn't enjoy or find interest in Matisse (for a time critics labeled him the "American Matisse" or "American Fauve"), Braque, or Vuillard—he even incorporated their technical resources—but he wore their influence lightly and never let it overdetermine his art and distract from his core values of intuited sentiment. The postmodern Tonalist Wolf Kahn wrote of Avery, who was his early mentor: "There was an overall absence of pressure or anxiety in the way he lived his life. He never taught, never got involved in art-world politics, didn't cultivate people for their possible usefulness, never looked for customers, didn't go

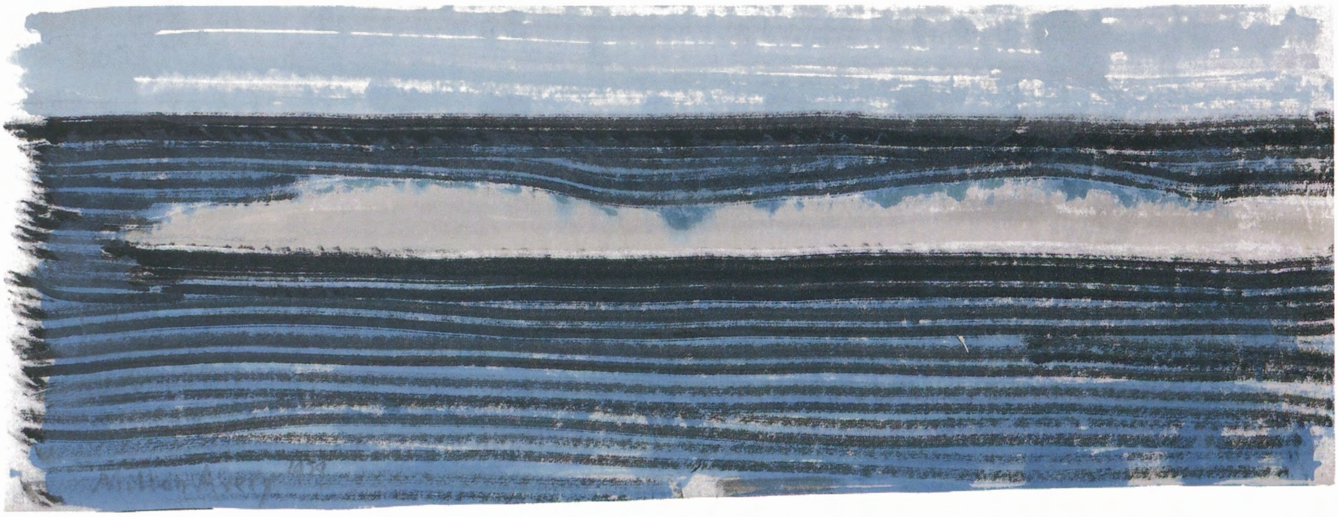


Fig. 8.140. Milton Avery, *Sand Spit*, 1959. Watercolor on rice paper, 9¼ x 23⅞ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

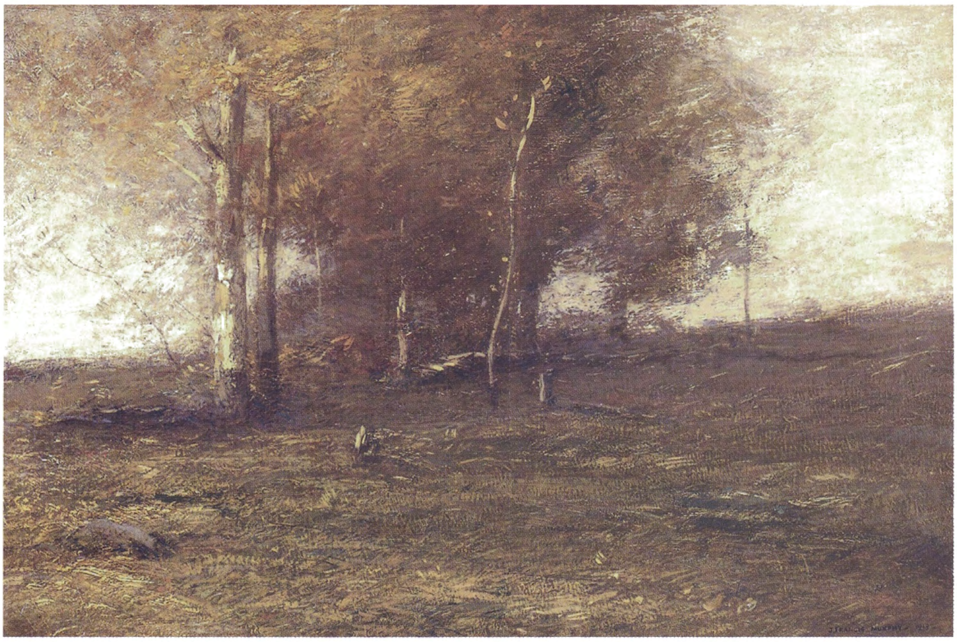


Fig. 8.141. J. Francis Murphy, *Afternoon Light (October Afternoon)*, 1913. Oil on canvas, 24 x 36 in. Courtesy Babcock Galleries.

out of his way to get to know critics. He lived simply, frugally, but always enjoyably. . . . If Avery was ambitious, and he must have been at some deeper level, it never showed except in his commitment to steady work."[217] It was this authenticity, artistic probity, self-deprecating humor, and love of the American vernacular—of Shaker form and sobriety, of duck decoys and weather vanes and all kinds of folk art—that allowed Avery to translate early twentieth-century Tonalism into mid-century Color Field painting. As Robert Hobbs has written, "Avery assumed the position of an untaught Connecticut Yankee who transformed Matisse into his modernist folk-art equivalent. But Avery's folk-art variations . . . are highly sophisticated; they draw on his knowledge of American Impressionism and Tonalism, which he subjects to saturated hues in the manner of the Fauves."[216]

That Avery's style affected so many Europhile sophisticates with its peculiar all-American charm and warmth, suggests how, even in the 1940s, Avery's sources in turn-of-the-century Tonalism, though largely forgotten, had not lost their underlying appeal. Yet the luminous, flatly painted color fields, the transparent opalescent washes, and lambent tonal forms modulated and unified by the ground of the canvas, all the elements that Avery brought to perfection in his late landscapes—even retaining the unifying atmospheric feeling and spiritual uplift of the older tradition—were fundamentally a minimalist extrapolation of the Tonalist art he had known in his youth. Something of the expressive, hardscrabble late landscapes of J. Francis Murphy, particularly Murphy's broad flat planes of earthy tones (*Afternoon Light (October Afternoon)*, 1913, fig. 8.141) comes through in Avery's Color Field abstractions.

It was this purity of vision, as abstract as it was true to life, pulsing with emotional warmth, that seems to have attracted a critic like Clement Greenberg, who probably had little notion of the depth and extent of the Tonalist aesthetic out of which Avery had emerged. Greenberg certainly noted the contribution of Albert Pinkham Ryder to Avery (as he had for Pollock), especially the interlocking shapes that give such superb formal unity to his art (Greenberg admired similar qualities in Marin, Dove, and Hartley), "a certain courage: they clung to the truth of their own very personal experience, however intimate, modest, or unenhanceable that truth was." Greenberg marveled and even struggled to quite explain the individuality of Avery's art, its sublime lightness, and "the morality of his eyes... how Avery locks his flat, lambent planes together with the *exact* dosage of light in his colors (all of which seem to have some admixture of white); with *exactly* how he manages to keep his pictures cool in key even when using the warmest of hues; with *exactly* how he inflects planes into depth with shading, and so on.... Nature is flattened and aerated....The picture floats but it also coheres and stays in place, as tight as a drum and open as light."[219] What Greenberg is grappling with is precisely the dynamic of the Tonalist aesthetic translated into a minimalist modernist vein. It was all there to see in the technical achievements of Whistler, or Murphy, or Twachtman, or even Inness, in addition to probably two dozen more Tonalist painters of the period, about whom Greenberg probably knew nothing.

Although Avery certainly drew upon Fauvist color application, and the thin, washy spontaneity and feel of watercolor, the medium in which he developed many of his shorthand symbols of nature, precisely as the prime generation of Tonalists in the 1880s and 1890s had been influenced by the spontaneity and freedom of progressive watercolor technique, his working methods hark back to his forbears, especially Murphy, who was a studio-based conceptualist. Avery created out of his mind's eye; visualization was the critical component of his art. The artist employed the recalled afterimage, an approach that controlled not only what happened on the canvas but instilled a visionary quality as well. It is this synthesizing impulse, bringing to bear the conceptual structure and emotions as one galvanizing force in the picture-making process, that Avery shares with Murphy, or even a painter like Inness, although Avery would never have worked over a canvas as obsessively as Inness, preferring the spontaneity and freshness of a premier coup. Like Inness, and so many Tonalists working in the intuitive vein of Emersonian idealism, the act of creation happened in the studio—and on the canvas in the adjustment of color tones to achieve a formal balance and structural integrity. And similar to his predecessors, the experience of beauty was expressed through memory, mostly unfiltered by preliminary studies, straight to the canvas. Avery's wife, Sally, noted the artist's use of "previsualization": "In approaching a canvas Milton had already measured and weighed a number of concepts. Sitting in his favorite rocker, pipe in hand, he would study the blank canvas. 'A blank canvas is a think of beauty. The challenge is to cover it and still retain that radiance.' Milton would sit and rock and visualize the painting he was about to create. When that image became loud and clear he would go to the easel, lightly sketch his motif, and begin to paint. As the painting took shape—it might be a figure, might be a landscape, it might be a seascape—the subject was not the object."[220]

Avery wrote of his own working method: "I like to seize the one sharp instant in Nature, to imprison it by means of ordered shapes and space relationships. To this end I eliminate and simplify, leaving apparently nothing but color and pattern. I am not seeking pure abstraction; rather, the purity and essence of the idea—expressed in its simplest form."[221] In many respects, Tonalists like William Morris Hunt (who codified the doctrine of form and color in his *Art Talks*), or Davies, Murphy, Kost, or Dewey, and certainly Whistler, could have written similar things about their art. Robert Hobbs, describing Avery's style, perfectly captures the effect of the Tonalist mode from which Avery derived his "radiant fields of color. These soft, ambient areas, each consisting of one dominant color scumbled or lightly brushed over a background of subtly variegated hues, creates the illusion of an embracing environment even though they are resolutely flat and painterly.... Conceiving his canvases in a variety of hues that are all of roughly the same value, except for one or two dark or light contrasts, Avery tunes each canvas to a distinct tone so that his colors work in unison. So inevitable do his compositions of the early forties begin to seem that one notes the distinct tone of a work before analyzing the different colors composing it."[222] Avery's simplified tonal forms embrace one another, unlike Fauvist colors, which often compete. His modernist aestheticism—asceticism may be equally as apt—epitomizes, too, the broad arc of Tonalism, which is essentially the story of simplification. Almost every major artist in the Tonalist pantheon moved from complexity to simplicity over the course of his career, as the style shifted from Aesthetic Tonalism to Expressive Tonalism from 1880 to 1910. The teleology unfolds thus: the impulse to simplicity (concentrating power and focus) yields greater purity of form, out of which develops a natural symbolism—symbolic forms, often reenergized by gestural facture—that in turn enhances the visual drama (the haunting poetry and dreamlike sensations of the Symbolists), and the resulting synthesizing convergence of the ensemble plumbs ever greater depths of effulgent power. In this way, Avery's minimalism demonstrates the latent abstracting kinetics of the Tonalist mode. Here, too, is the convergence of Tonalism's visual power and the efficiency of emotional impact at the heart of the Symbolist movement. Critic Charles de Kay captured this sine qua non of Tonalism in his 1910 discussion of Millet, who insisted that great art depended on the subtle balancing of values, and the stark drama of organic form that sounded the silent desire for, to use Millet's term, *pondération*.

This same feeling of awe and wonder—to partake in and contemplate the sublime—in a great work of art was, after all, the central goal of an artist like Mark Rothko. Avery's destination was not as tragically existential as Rothko's but no less profound. There are even similarities in Avery's themes of the 1940s and 1950s, his simple interiors and intimate landscapes, and the nostalgic spiritualizing landscapes of the Tonalists from 1880 to 1910. Both periods experienced profound shocks. The post–Civil War generations had to deal with the savagery of a fraternal bloodbath, the failures of Reconstruction, and unprecedented social and industrial changes. The generation of the 1940s knew World War I, the Great Depression, World War II, the Holocaust, the anxieties of the Cold War, and the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation. The abstracting simplification of Avery, and the subsequent drive for complete abstraction by Rothko, Gottlieb, and Newman in the late 1940s, can at least be partially understood as a response to the cumulative soul-shocks of these decades. All were reaching for a bedrock, an unadorned iconography that addressed the trauma of anxious times. This also explains the extent of Avery's influence on Rothko, Gottlieb, and Newman, whose families summered together in Provincetown for years. Many of Avery's luminous natural forms and his soft-edged, symbolic iconology seem to find their way into Rothko's early work, only to be further refined and simplified in his dematerialized color fields and Multiforms of the late 1940s.[223]

The same is true of Adolph Gottlieb's floating stellar orbs and explosive calligraphies.[224] Gottlieb's *Equinox*, 1963 (fig.

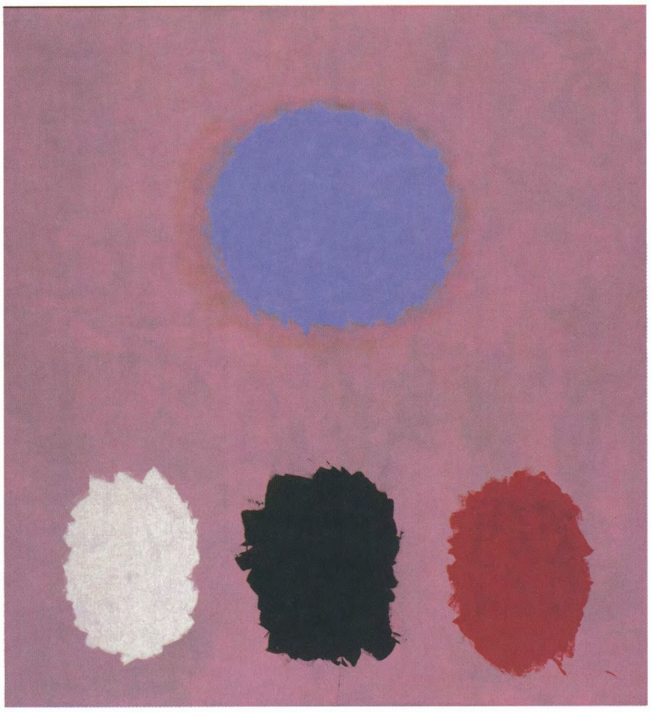


Fig. 8.142. Adolph Gottlieb, *Equinox*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 90 x 84 in. Courtesy The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

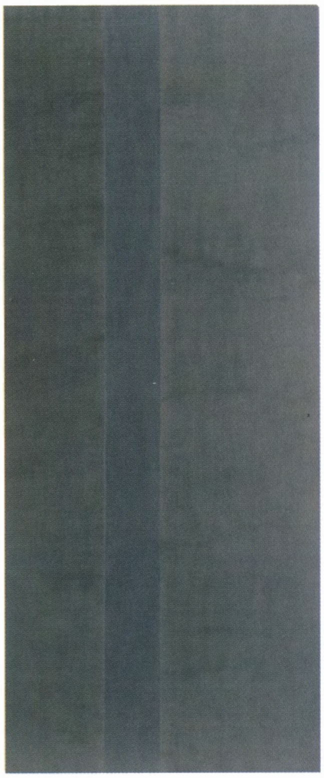


Fig. 8.143. Barnett Newman, *Abraham*, 1949. Oil on canvas, 82 x 34½ in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund.

8.142), is marvelous updating of the Tonalist tradition, allowing a sky-blue ground to flicker through the thinned, pink-toned surface, creating the visual feel of foggy refracted light, with the ground emerging as an orb highlighted by a halation of stronger pinks to dramatize its dominant role in the composition. This stunning reversal of what the eye expects from nature, making a negative space appear as positive form, is reversed again by the starkly positive calligraphic splotches of white, black, and red, which in a traditional rendering of landscape, would constitute the foreground. The result is a visual equivalent of the equinox, when the sun crosses the equator in March and September, the two days a year when day and night are of equal length around the globe. Barnett Newman's precursors to his Zip paintings of the 1960s, like *Abraham*, 1949 (fig. 8.143), intimate the stark Symbolist iconography of a bare tree trunk in a dimly lit forest setting. The thin washes of various green tones are given variety by the subtle brush marks and the pale outlining of the vertical form, eliciting a mysterious vibrancy that brings to animate life what on first glance might seem pure abstraction. William Baziotes, too, thoroughly delighted in Avery's sensuous aesthetic in his Symbolist dreamscapes. Older than the major Abstract Expressionists by almost a generation, Avery maintained his artistic equilibrium, working his way toward a kind of vernacular abstraction that remained free of subservience to European modes: an achievement vitalized by his profound emotional connection to place, family, and the inner eye of the imagination.

In terms of the Tonalist heritage, it is difficult to differentiate between direct influence, of the kind Albert Pinkham Ryder had on almost every American Abstract Expressionist from Pollock to Rothko, and the underlying gravitational field of the wider culture on which the Tonalist aesthetic had always drawn for support and sustenance. Nor should one forget the crucial element of place, for instance, in the landscapes of Provincetown, which played a central role in the emotional attraction to soft atmospheric light for Avery, Rothko, Newman, Gottlieb, and later Wolf Kahn, as Newport had for Hunt and La Farge, Martin and Twachtman, and Venice and the Thames for Whistler. One sees a similar arc, too, in the struggle of Whistler and Rothko to simplify their work, to throw off the influence of constricting European modes and extraneous literary sources for a kind of Puritan aestheticism. Although Rothko and others may have been driving for a more open-ended abstraction, a way of expressing Rothko's "basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so forth,"[225] the Abstract Expressionists share much of the same sense of mystery and awe in relation to the visible world as their fin-de-siècle progenitors. Much as Whistler had struggled for purity in his art by eliminating details and narrative, by dematerializing form into areas of liquid pigment, so Rothko developed his mindscapes by a process of elimination and refinement. Rothko biographer James Breslin notes: "Rothko's art advanced by a series of subtractions, or renunciations—a view supported by Rothko's own 1949 statement... that 'the progression of a painter's work moves 'toward the elimination of all obstacles between the painter and the idea, and between the idea and the observer,' toward the ideal elimination of all cultural mediation so that the painting confronts the viewer as an immediate presence.

'People who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when painting them.'"[226]

Green and Maroon, 1953 (fig. 8.144), displays Rothko's sense of the sublime, floating his green and maroon tonal forms so that they appear detached from the picture plane, approximating the sensation of a horizon, sky, and foreground, but going beyond to some otherworldly symbolization. Rothko's need to escape solitude and silence in his quest to let his paintings express something greater than the moment, to overcome time itself, echoes Inness's painterly search to explore the unseen through the seen. In her catalogue of the exhibition *Color as Field: American Painting 1950–1975*, art historian Karen Wilkin comments that the link between Rothko and the Color Field painters "was the conviction that the role of art was not to report on the visible, but to reveal the unknown."[227] This drive for a more efficient emotional delivery system—abstraction and symbolization—was central to the Tonalist movement and might well be regarded as a peculiarly American solution to an artistic problem: practical, forthright, and no nonsense. It can even be argued that the tendency in the early 1950s to move toward a more stark and monochromatic range of tones, verging on black and white, in the work of de Kooning, Gottlieb, Franz Kline, and Robert Motherwell, was another manifestation of Tonalism's color-restricted vocabulary to provide a more dramatic read and awe-inspiring imagery.

The contemporary art historian Robert Rosenblum has cast his net even wider in terms of encompassing the artistic continuities that join Whistler (and by extension the Tonalist movement) and Rothko. Rosenblum describes Rothko as suspended between artistic traditions, enjoying the sensuous beauty of paint on canvas in the canon of taste described by art for art's sake, at the same time struggling for an austere purity of almost puritanical plainness. In a 1987 essay on Rothko he wrote, "Even when his ascetic spirit reigns, Rothko can still be seen as a master of exquisite nuance who works within the realm of veiled tonal refinement that was first espoused by Whistler. Connected, like Rothko, with both American and European culture, Whistler could create in both his figural and landscape paintings a kind of puritanical aestheticism that would have as a goal a pictorial surface of delectation for the eye, but would then restrain this hedonistic potential by a constant paring down and muting of sensation. . . . Even Whistler's favored format, two or three broad zones of the haziest tonalities both fused and separated by the glimmer of a horizon line, announces the structural combination of elemental clarity and infinitely varied subtlety that Rothko would make his own. . . . Milton Avery . . . a formative influence . . . also belongs to the Whistlerian, Anglo-American tradition of puritanical aestheticism. . . ."[228]

Rosenblum made an even broader argument for an underlying cultural proclivity that embraces the kind of spiritual and symbolic dynamic inherent in Tonalism in his 1975 study *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*. Looking across the centuries, he detects a Northern Romantic spirit, an introspective stance of that connects artists in northern Europe and America, including Caspar David Friedrich, Turner, Constable, Whistler, Rothko, Barnett Newman, Clyfford Still, O'Keeffe, Dove, Pollock, and of course Avery and Rothko. This common ethos or cultural predisposition combines aspects of Protestant individuality and Emersonian Transcendentalism with a romantic sensibility of art for art's sake that is particularly drawn to the sublime mystery of landscape: nature's realm and the pantheistic embodiment of the divine source or godhead. The Tonalist painter Birge Harrison, who drew conclusions similar to Rosenblum's, stated in a 1912 paper he presented before the American Academy of Arts and Letters, "In general the Germanic and Scandinavian races of the North, with their strong underlying strain of mysticism, have tended more to color and to sentiment in their art than to design."[229] As has been seen in chapter 7, the Tonalist landscapes emblazoned in

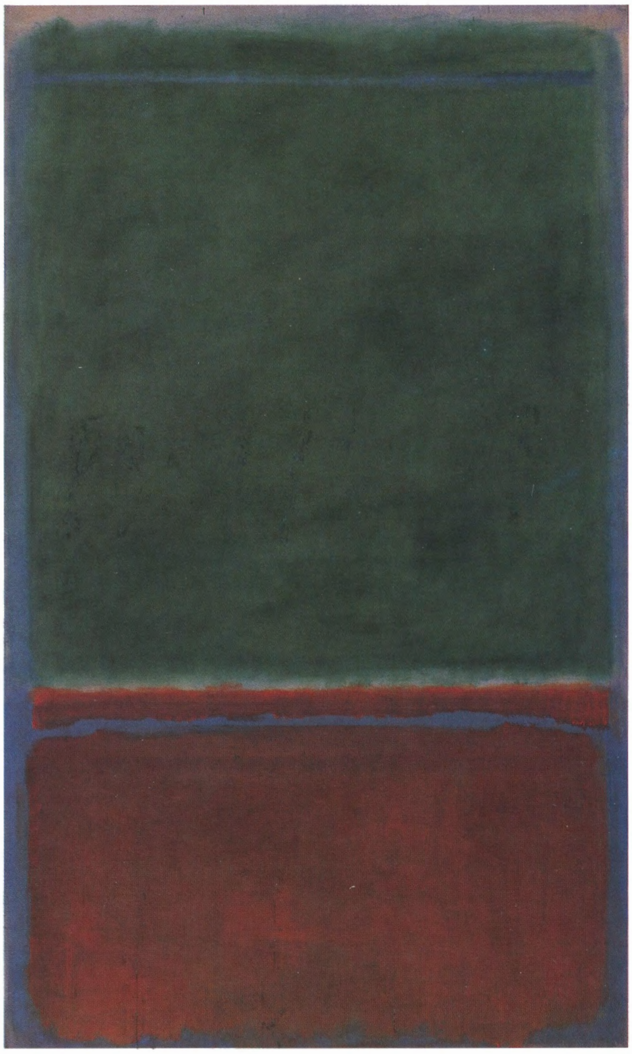


Fig. 8.144. Mark Rothko, *Green and Maroon*, 1953. Oil on canvas, 91⅛ x 54⅞ in. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

gilded gold frames in the Victorian parlor provided a kind of surrogate spiritual focus in place of traditional religious imagery or objects of devotion. Rothko certainly viewed his art in this light—literally so—for the artist not only consciously strived for a religious dimension in his work, but conceived it in terms of specific semi-sacred spaces where it was to be properly hung, lit, and displayed so as to best elicit the work's transporting vision, intended to be contemplated in silence.

If Rothko's dematerialized color fields take the Tonalist aesthetic to the apogee of otherworldly transcendence—constituting an "essentially crypto-religious art," in Rosenblum's estimation—Jackson Pollock's raw untrammeled lyricism, evident in *Collage and Oil*, circa 1951 (fig. 8.145), tapped into the movement's expressive and romantic heritage, less haunting perhaps, but no less searing to the imagination. Contemporary critic Jed Perl has noted this connection in the very stuff of Pollock's art. "He is the first painter I know of to have got something positive from the muddiness of color that so profoundly characterizes a great deal of American painting. It is the equivalent, even if in a negative, helpless way, of that American chiaroscuro which dominated Melville, Hawthorne, Poe, and has been best translated into painting by Blakelock and Ryder."[230] Perl is just the last in a line of mid-twentieth- to twenty-first-century critics to note and delve into the connection of Ryder to so many American modern artists. This reputation helped sustain Ryder's profile in American art while that of so many of his contemporaries faded. Clement Greenberg referred to Ryder in a review of Jackson Pollock's work as early as 1943. Greenberg, too, cherished Ryder for what he called his American chiaroscuro (presumably where Perl got the expression), identifying it with tenebrous interiors and stark light-and-shadow worlds he detected in Poe, Melville, and other literary sources, "of oppositions which have a retreating, inward-directed force like that of contrasts of light and shade within deep space."[231]

In 1947, when the Whitney Museum of American Art opened a retrospective of Ryder's work, this outsider and Romantic Tonalist was confirmed in his place as a proto-modernist. Mid-century art historian Lloyd Goodrich wrote in the catalogue that accompanied the Whitney's exhibition on Ryder that the artist "used the elements of nature far more freely than any American of his time. He simplified them to their essentials, to what was purely expressive; and he remolded them and made them obey the rhythms of his instinctive sense of design. . . . Ryder had a sensuous passion for form such as most artists have only for color. . . . Every line and shape had a definite flow and was vitally related to every other line and shape. An extreme sensitiveness to interrelations of forms governed his work."[232] Robert Rosenblum further explains Ryder's influence on Pollock by integrating both artists into a wider, Northern Romantic stream of sensibility. "Indeed, Ryder's art, even within its literally small format, often seizes the immensities of elemental forces in a manner prophetic of Pollock's search for a structure and a technical means that would convey the overwhelming energies and velocities of nature."[233] Ryder's proto-modern identity in the eyes of late twentieth-century scholarship resulted in his remaining pigeonholed for over half a century as a lonely voice, along with Ralph Albert Blakelock, in the empty wilderness of turn-of-the-century American art. It is one of the great ironies of American art history that this underground stream of lyrical and visionary Tonalist sensibility—at its core an ambiguous abstract expression—continued to well up in the work of so many mid-century American modernists, unaccountably so in the minds of historians; its origins seemed obscure and remained virtually undetected, and so caused much scholarly head-scratching in terms of explaining the cultural milieu of a Ryder or Blakelock, or the emergence of a Milton Avery, to say nothing of ignoring the inherent qualities of this very American aesthetic stance.

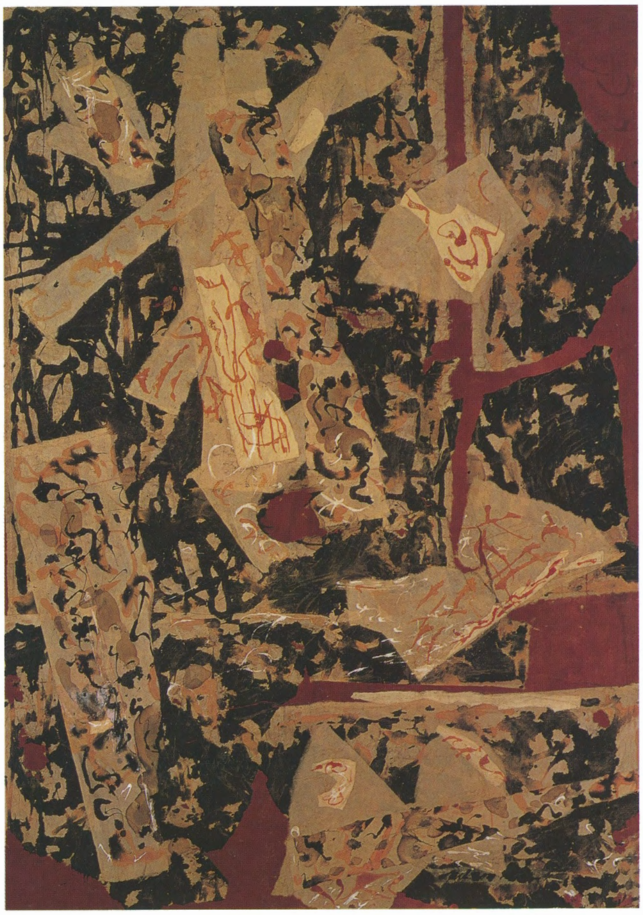


Fig. 8.145. Jackson Pollock, *Collage and Oil*, c. 1951. Collage and oil, 50 x 35 in. Acquired 1958, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

Strangest of all, one of the precipitating events in bringing this underground stream of Tonalist—American—Romanticism back to the surface, came not from within American art but from without, and from Europe. In the late 1950s, Monet's late masterpieces of tonal Expressionism, known

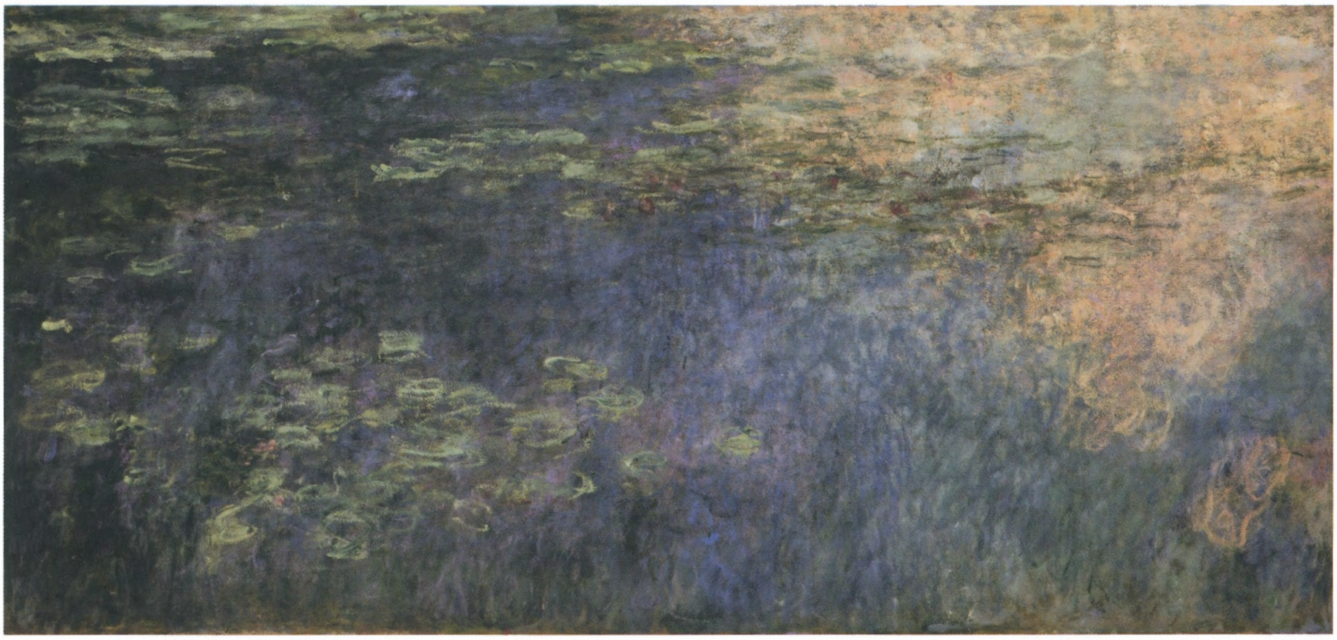


Fig. 8.146. Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*, c. 1920. Oil on canvas; left panel of triptych, 6 ft. 6¾ in. x 13 ft. 11¼ in. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

together as *Water Lilies*, circa 1920 (fig. 8.146), were acquired by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. These late works, very much under the sway of Whistlerian aestheticism (as were Picasso's Blue Period works), were a sensation in the New York art world. As Jed Perl has pointed out, the installation of *Water Lilies* provided a painterly and expressive pastoral vision that influenced generations of American artists, especially the Color Field painters and postmodern Tonalists like Wolf Kahn, who responded to Monet's rhapsodic abstraction and transcendental epiphanies of dematerialized color and form. Perl noted the bafflement of many at mid-century over the seeming ahistorical nature of these late Monets, because the style refused to fit into the standard modernist categories famously described in schematic form by Alfred H. Barr on the dust jacket of his catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art*, in 1936 (fig. 8.147), from which Whistler was banished as if he had never existed. Clement Greenberg was also somewhat at a loss as to the origins of Monet's late style, although he quickly embraced its salutary lessons of abstraction from nature. "What he [Monet] found in the end was, however, not so much a new as a more comprehensive principle; and it lay not in Nature, as he thought, but in the essence of art itself, in art's 'abstractness.' That he himself could not recognize this makes no difference."[234]

Robert Rosenblum, on the other hand, was able to connect Rothko and the modernist systematic exploration of a single motif in multiple versions to Whistler and Monet. "Monet, in particular, had systematically launched the possibility of choosing one subject—a haystack, a row of poplars, a bend in the Seine—and exploring a potentially infinite number of variations upon it in which endlessly elusive sensations of colored light both veil and reveal new aspects of an elementary motif. As in Rothko's chromatic and tonal variations upon his own archetypal structure, Monet's series of paintings offer the widest possible range of aesthetic discriminations, from the blazing intensities of sunlit reds and oranges with their

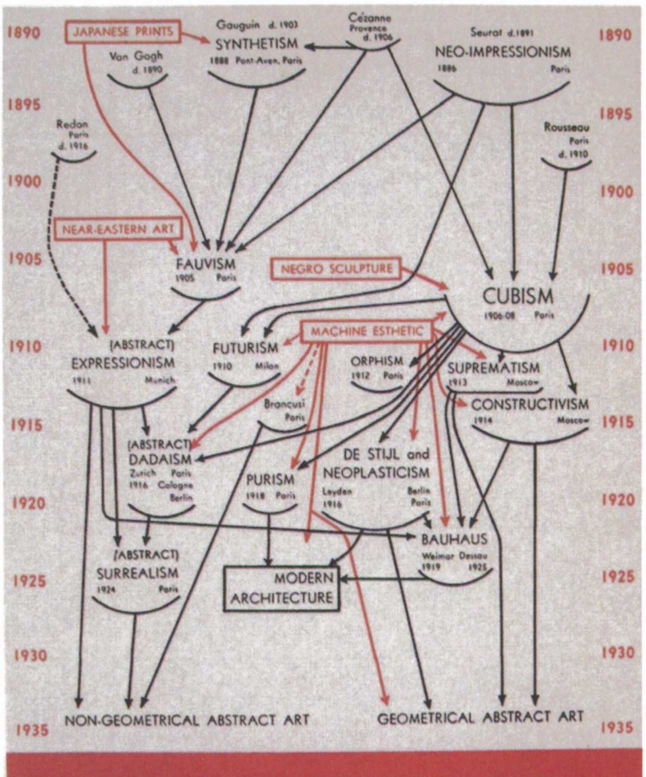

1890
JAPANESE PRINTS
Gauguin d. 1903
SYNTHETISM
1888 Pont-Aven, Paris
Cézanne
Provence
d. 1906
Seurat d. 1891
NEO-IMPRESSIONISM
1886 Paris
Van Gogh
d. 1890
1895
Redon
Paris
d. 1916
Rousseau
Paris
d. 1910
1900
NEAR-EASTERN ART
1905
FAUVISM
1905 Paris
NEGRO SCULPTURE
CUBISM
1906-08 Paris
1910
(ABSTRACT)
EXPRESSIONISM
1911 Munich
FUTURISM
1910 Milan
MACHINE ESTHETIC
ORPHISM
1912 Paris
SUPREMATISM
1913 Moscow
Brancusi
Paris
CONSTRUCTIVISM
1914 Moscow
1915
(ABSTRACT)
DADAISM
Zurich Paris
1916 Cologne
Berlin
PURISM
1918 Paris
DE STIJL and
NEOPLASTICISM
Leyden Berlin
1916 Paris
1920
BAUHAUS
Weimar Dessau
1919 1925
(ABSTRACT)
SURREALISM
1924 Paris
MODERN
ARCHITECTURE
1925
1930
NON-GEOMETRICAL ABSTRACT ART
GEOMETRICAL ABSTRACT ART
1935
CUBISM AND ABSTRACT ART

Fig. 8.147. Cover of Alfred Barr's *Cubism and Abstract Art*, published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1936.

blue-violet reflections to the near-invisibility of pallid hues concealed by the fog of dawn. In Monet, as in Rothko, this total immersion in the evanescent phenomena of colored light and atmosphere can lead through the looking glass of perception into a more subjective world of dream and meditation . . ."[235]

Whether fog of dawn or evanescent hues of colored light, whether along the Thames, the canals of Venice, or amidst a private garden in Giverny, or in Newport, Provincetown, or the Connecticut hills, the Tonalists, as has already been seen, took Monet's serial paintings a step further by executing series drawn from similar motifs but encompassing different angles, reverse angles, and complex vantage points, which in turn elicited new perceptions and formalist problems, as well as a stirring range of Symbolist imagery. In this wider context, Monet's *Water Lilies*, brilliant and scintillating as they are, actually came late to the genre of Expressive Tonalism, inspired in America by the late works of Whistler and the lingering influence of Currier, Twachtman, and Muhrman, and were pre-dated by many of the American Tonalists not least, Charles Fromuth, whose coruscating pastels of saturated water surfaces, resplendent with swirls of reflected light, Monet most certainly would have known by way of salon exhibitions. Yet it was late Monet, and the installation of the artist's huge lily-pad paintings at the Museum of Modern Art in the 1950s, that did much to galvanize the rebirth of the Tonalist aesthetic in new guise, in the postwar splendor of Color Field painters led by Helen Frankenthaler and postmodern Tonalists like Wolf Kahn.

Postmodern Tonalism, Twentieth-Century Artists, and Wolf Kahn

I have a great liking for images which are somehow devoid of "incident"—houses, roads, fences or shepherds with red vests such as abound in 19th-century landscape painting. If I was able I would leave everything out, as Turner was able to do in his last paintings; leave out everything and still have a sense of place, a mood, and an exactitude and monumentality of scale.[236]

—Wolf Kahn, 1979

The reemergence of American Tonalism in contemporary guise can be traced to four factors: a causal chain of indirect influence from the wellsprings of turn-of-the-century Tonalism; the influence of certain microclimates or places where atmospheric conditions produced foggy or veiled effects; formalist concerns for which tonal-style painting presented a ready solution and expressive modus; and the direct influence on contemporary artists, certainly in the late 1970s, by the Tonalist movement's finest painters, especially Inness, Tryon, and Whistler, who benefited from reappraisal by scholars and comprehensive exhibitions. A fifth factor might well include the ongoing tradition of Emersonian Transcendentalism in both its literary and philosophical forms—and concomitant spiritual and ecological concerns, which reconnected Americans to the land—that in turn fostered a growing market and deeper appreciation for the postmodern Tonalist style in American art. Outside the circle of Color Field painters already mentioned, many postwar painters, employing traditional and nontraditional methods of paint application, developed along Tonalist lines. These include Jon Schueler (*The Cloud (58-61)*, 1961, fig. 8.148), Edwin Dickinson (*Nina's Marsh*, 1942, fig. 8.149), Russell Chatham (*Summer Moon Rising*, 2009, fig. 8.150), Joan Mitchell (*Hans*, 1981, fig. 8.151), Jane Wilson (*Still Dawn*, 2006, fig. 8.152), Fairfield Porter, Wolf Kahn, and younger contemporary artists like Paul Balmer (*Dust and Heat*, 2008, fig. 8.153), Lisa Breslow (*Island Bay #2*, 2005, fig. 8.154), Pamela Sztybel (*Leaning Left, Leaning Right, Bridgewater, Connecticut*, 2006, p. 560), and Terry DeLapp (*Passing Storm–Nipomo*, 2004, p. 560).

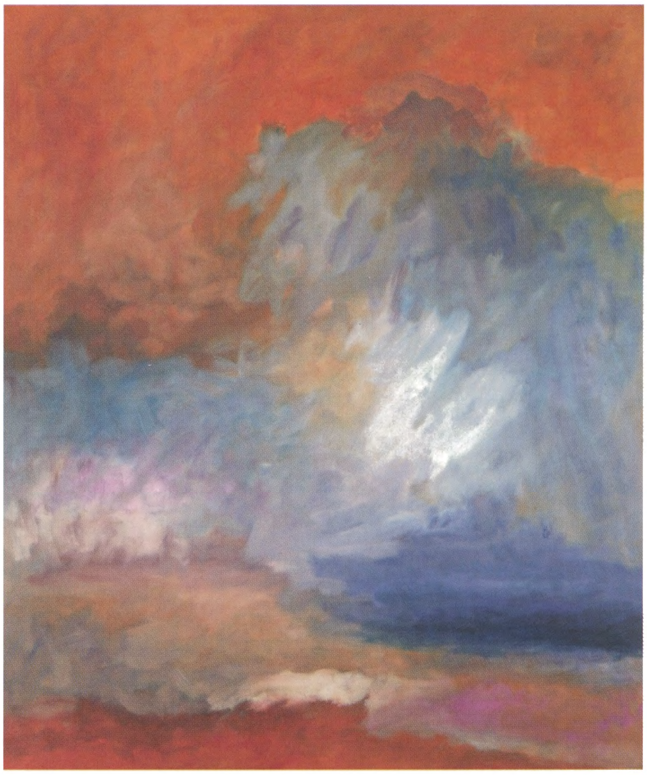


Fig. 8.148. Jon Schueler, *The Cloud (58-61)*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 60 x 51 in. Courtesy David Findlay Jr. Gallery, New York.

Fairfield Porter (1907–1975) is one of many postwar American artists who struggled for recognition during the glory days of Abstract Expressionism. Porter, an astute, intelligent critic in his own right, through all the ups and downs of his career gravitated toward abstracting representations of nature, finding there, especially on his home ground of Spruce Head Island, Maine, a reflection of his deepest spiritual yearnings, free of the lockstep attitudes, commercial and otherwise, that he felt distorted so much in the art world of the postwar decades. As Thoreau had sought the intersection of the material

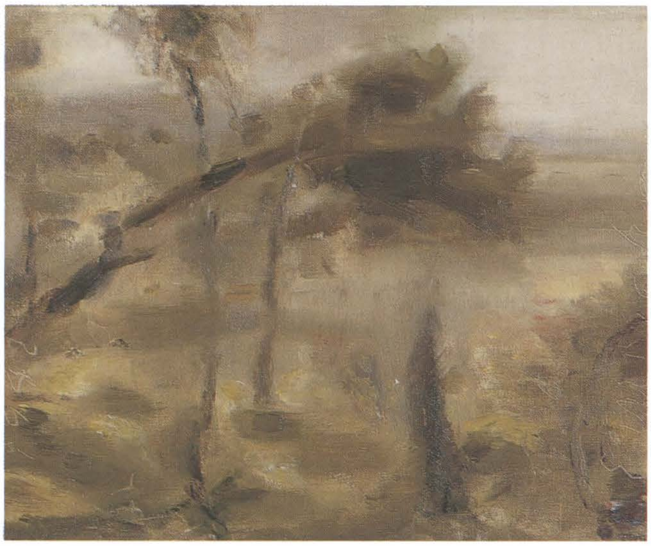


Fig. 8.149. Edwin Dickinson, *Nina's Marsh*, 1942. Oil on canvas, 10 x 12 in. Courtesy Babcock Galleries, New York.

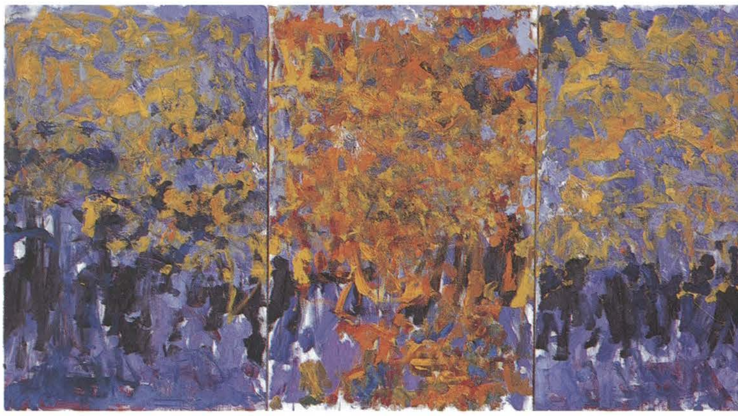


Fig. 8.151. Joan Mitchell, *Hans*, 1981. Oil on canvas, 77 x 153 in. Courtesy Kristy Stubbs Gallery, Dallas, TX.

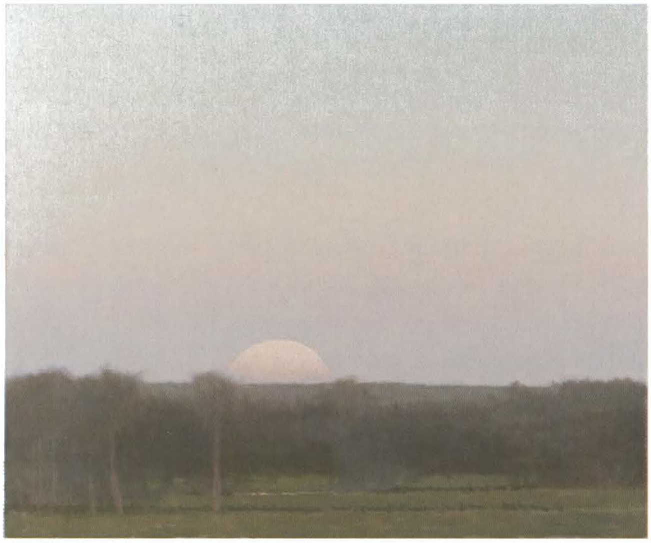


Fig. 8.150. Russell Chatham, *Summer Moon Rising*, 2009. Oil on Belgian linen, 30 x 36 in. Courtesy Brick Walk Fine Art, West Hartford, CT.

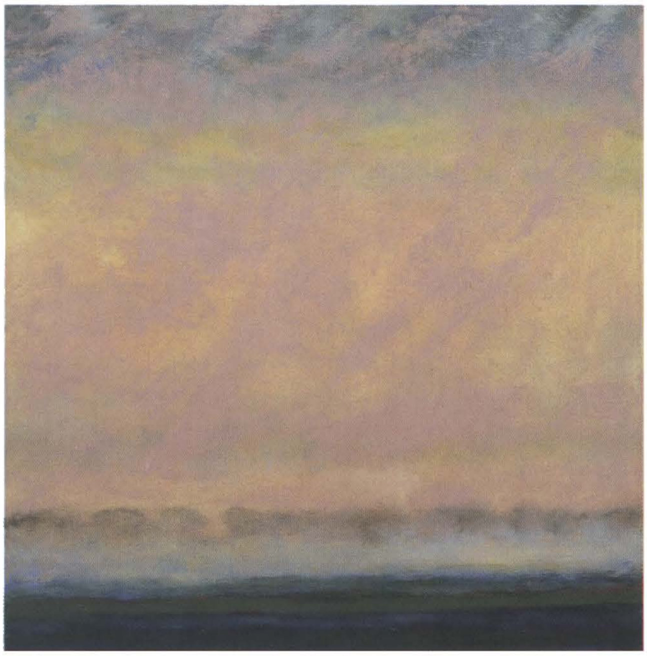


Fig. 8.152. Jane Wilson, *Still Dawn*, 2006. Oil on canvas, 24 x 24 in. Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, New York.

and spiritual in nature, through his art Porter prospected for the everyday epiphanies of the world as it is. He wrote to a former student in 1973, "I think . . . that a strong religious feeling requires a strong sense of matter-of-fact."[237] His watercolor *The Trail*, 1974 (fig. 8.155), depicting a secluded spot on his beloved Spruce Head Island, resonates with introspection and an expressive feeling for the unseen aliveness of nature. Porter probably had no familiarity with the watercolors of J. Frank Currier, yet the similarities in style and approach are striking. The sun, a mere penciled outline in the top right-hand corner of Porter's watercolor, is the abiding source of enchantment, of light and atmosphere and symbolic form that consumed the artist's imagination and informed the soft tonalities of his last and greatest watercolors. Porter believed that "a painting should contain a mystery, but not for mystery's sake: a mystery that is essential to reality."[238] In this, Porter, and Tonalist artists from Inness to his own time, shared a common spiritual heritage.

Perhaps no other artist has exploited Tonalism's full gamut of stylistic possibilities like the contemporary American artist Wolf Kahn (b. 1927). As such, he offers an exemplary subject for exploring the ways in which the deep, indigenous roots of Tonalism broke through time and again in late-twentieth-century American art, and continue to do so through the present day.

The young Wolf Kahn (fig. 8.156), born in Stuttgart, Germany, arrived in New York from Nazi-overrun Europe in 1940 with virtually no firsthand exposure to the American art tradition. His art student days in the late 1940s and early 1950s in New York (with one summer in Provincetown on Cape Cod) largely revolved around the expatriate-exile European

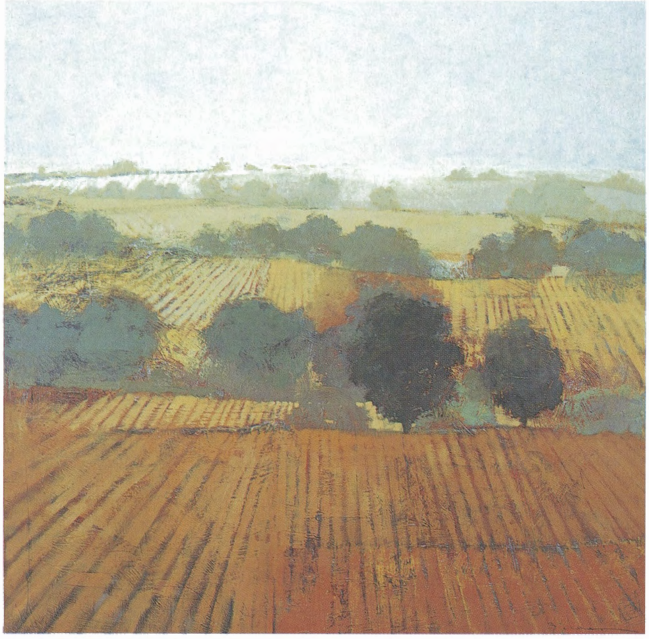


Fig. 8.153. Paul Balmer, *Dust and Heat*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 40 x 40 in. Courtesy Paul Balmer.

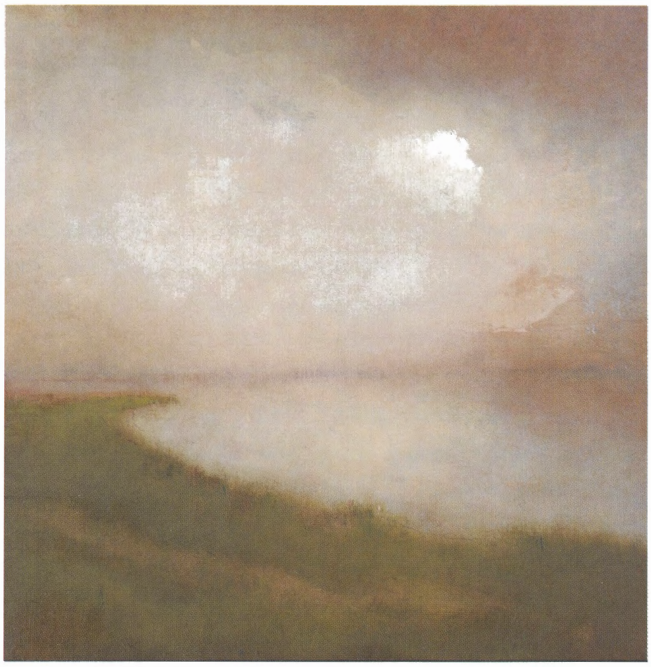


Fig. 8.154. Lisa Breslow, *Island Bay #2*, 2005. Oil on panel, 20 x 20 in. Heckscher Museum of Art. Gift of the artist.

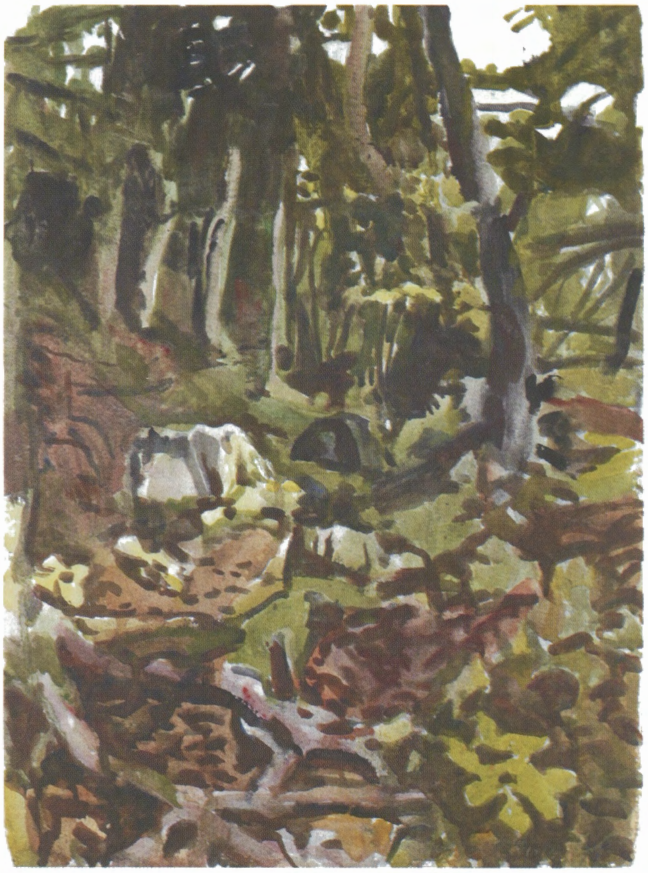


Fig. 8.155. Fairfield Porter, *The Trail*, 1974. Watercolor, 16 x 12 in. Private collection.

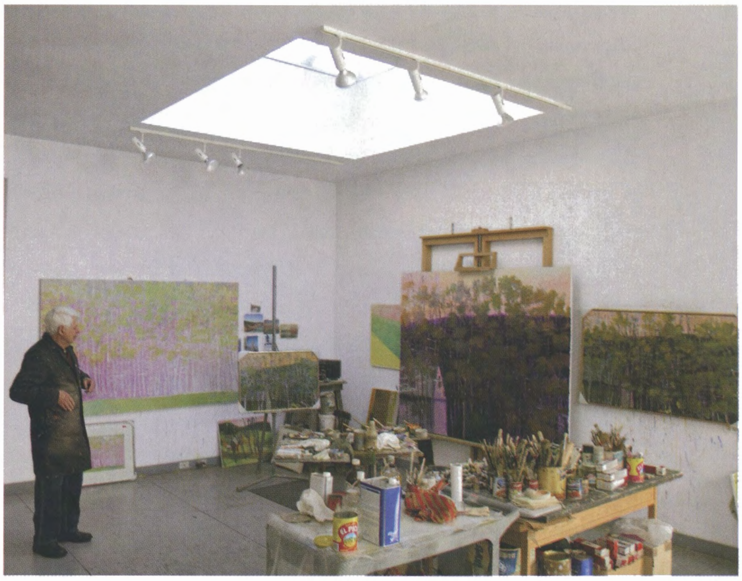
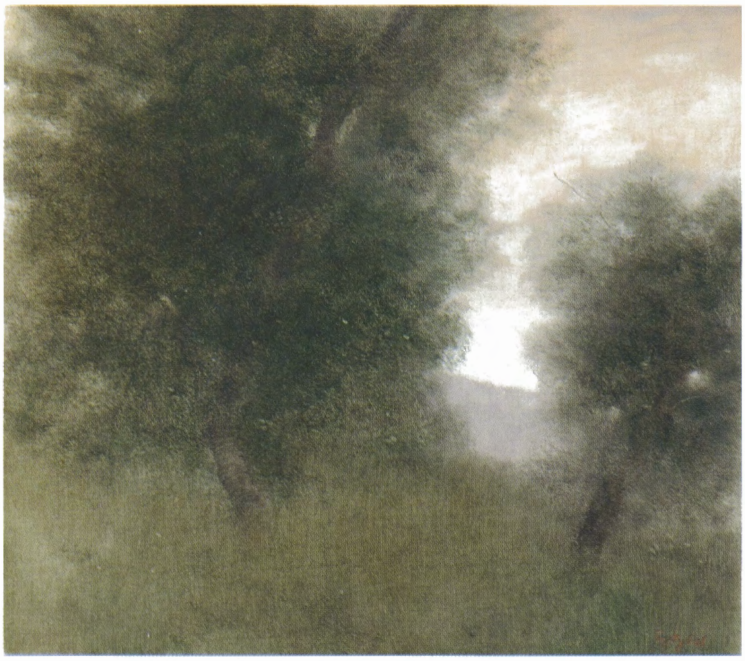
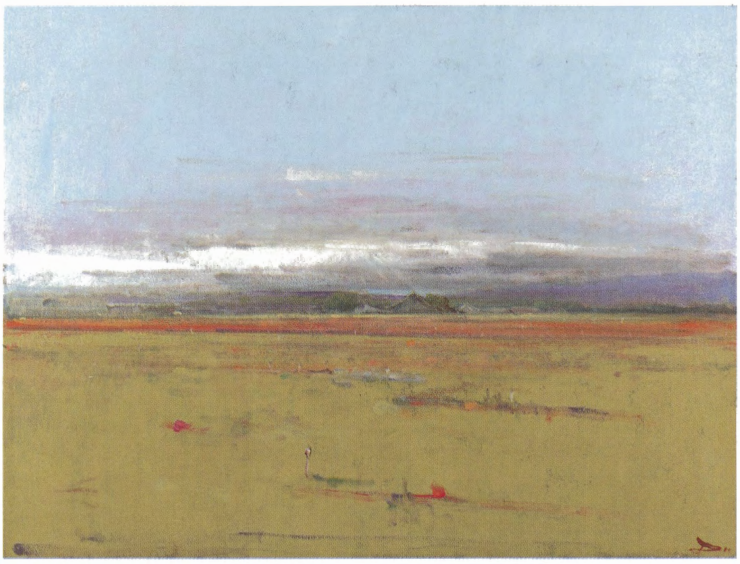


Fig. 8.156. Wolf Kahn in his studio, undated photograph.

modernist tradition and the teaching circle of Hans Hofmann. Kahn's early work showed the influence of Soutine, Bonnard, Vuillard, and Edward Hopper, as well as the insights of Hofman, specifically the employment of formal control in composing paintings, and an openness to influence and accident when it advances the artist's goals. As a member of the New York School's second generation, Kahn was well aware of all the possibilities of post-abstract painting, whether figurative or landscape, representational or otherwise. Like many American painters of his generation living in the shadow of the major exponents of Abstract Expressionism, the stylistic directions for a young artist were bewildering; so diverse were the options that the acquisition of an individual signature style was often fraught with the anxiety of influence—an anxiety from which the young Kahn seems to have remained largely immune. The genesis of Kahn's mature style, as had been the case with Mark Rothko, was sparked by his exposure to Milton Avery (and



Pamela Sztybel, *Leaning Left, Leaning Right, Bridgewater, Connecticut*, 2006. Oil on linen, 14 x 15½ in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.



Terry DeLapp, *Passing Storm–Nipomo*, 2004. Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 32 in. Courtesy Spanierman Gallery, New York.

the indirect influence of Tonalism), whom he came to know in the summer of 1956 in Provincetown. According to Kahn's biographer, Justin Spring, Avery so enjoyed Kahn's company that he invited the young artist to paint with him. "During this crucial period, Kahn may have been influenced by Avery's daring use of simplified imagery, calm brushwork, and open color surfaces to transmit feeling. The emotional tone of Avery's work was unusual for the period, for his paintings celebrated optimism, wonder, and happiness. Although Kahn had been, up to this point, too ambitious to direct his efforts to the expression of simple feelings, Avery's work demonstrated that such direct and joyful emotions were valid enough to merit serious exploration. Moreover, Kahn was impressed by the dignity and self-assurance with which Avery went about his work."[239]

The reemergence or acceptance of "simple feelings" as a valid basis of art, representational or abstract, in this period of turmoil and high ambition—the proclamation of profound existential themes had been de rigueur among the Abstract Expressionists—was no small thing. Kahn, not unlike Avery in the 1930s and 1940s, was able to ride the sea of influence and high ambition with a certain measure of equanimity, giving himself space and time to absorb tradition and innovation when it suited the inherent direction of his work. Allowing oneself the luxury to indulge simple feelings for the sake of feelings, existential or otherwise, was a feat of maturity and judgment for an artist in the late 1950s, a period of ferment reminiscent of the late 1870s, as American artists took stylistic ideas from Europe but their inspiration from the emotional ties to home ground. Kahn's brand of Emersonian independence—tacking against the prevailing cultural winds in order to jettison dead forms and embrace the new and vital—enabled the thirty-year-old artist to better open himself to the sensuous properties of landscape, touching on the sentiment of felt response, but not sentimentality, which had always energized the expressive temperament of the Tonalist movement.

If Avery and the warm, sea-saturated atmosphere of Provincetown began a transition in Kahn's palette toward a softer, amorphous tonal style, his move to Venice in late 1956 confirmed and enlarged this direction as Kahn became increasingly infatuated with planar Tonalism. The warm tones of his Provincetown painting gave way to the silvery hues of the winter lagoon. Justin Spring writes, "Over the next two years, Kahn worked in a nature-inspired minimalist vocabulary, in which the hazes of Venice—neither fog nor glare, but a cool, velvet shimmer—would move him away from chromatic pyrotechnics and thick impasto toward an exceptionally subtle rendering of nearly monochromatic tonal landscapes rendered in a smooth dry stroke."[240] *Umbrian Hilltown #2*, 1958 (fig. 8.157), painted during a trip from Venice, retains the silver-gray haze of the lagoon city, a diffused opalescent light source, but scrubbed and worked over the canvas with expressive force to produce ringing variations on pearl-gray and infinite shadings of white. Only the barest hints of trees and buildings break the vibrant color fields, verging on complete abstraction.

Kahn was recapitulating the experience of so many Tonalist painters before him—a tradition of which he was not unaware. "In Venice I did some all white paintings in response to milky light and whitish fog. I was entranced by the white vaporetti moving through white space in the place where the marittima should've been. Color became secondary. Whistler interested me in his use of overall light with very small variations. I painted Whistler in Rome, painted him over and over along the Tiber. I was very aware I was being influenced

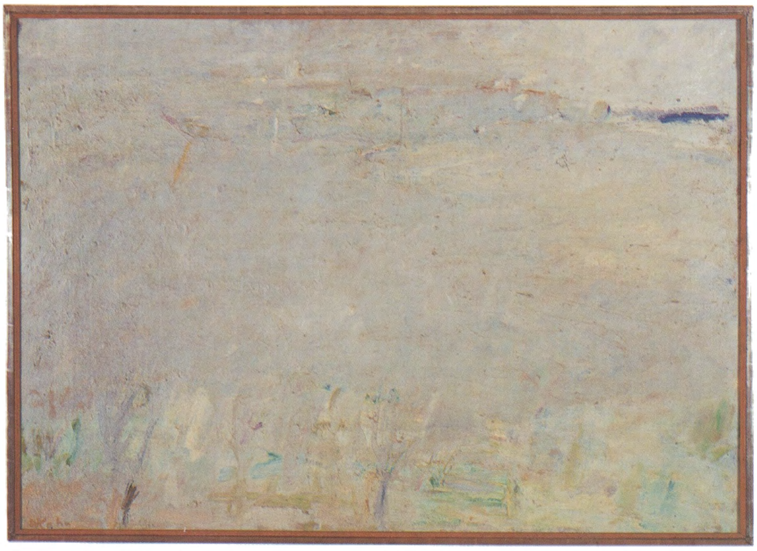


Fig. 8.157. Wolf Kahn, *Umbrian Hilltown #2*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 35½ x 49 in. Collection of the artist.

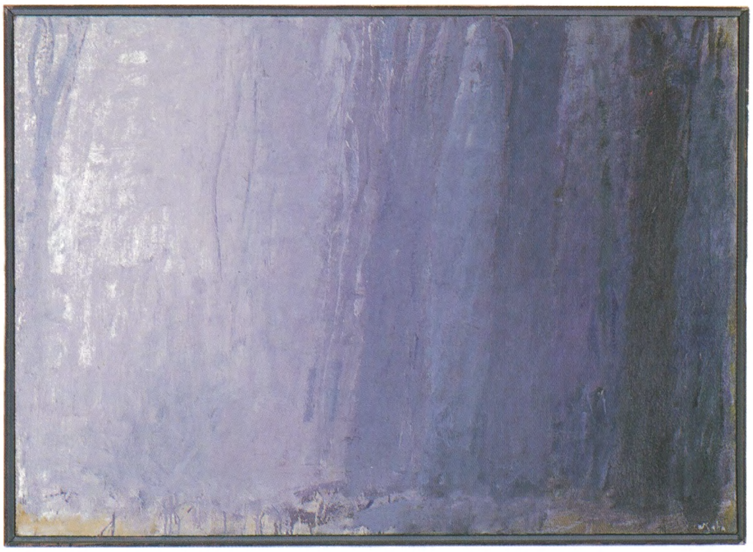


Fig. 8.158. Wolf Kahn, *Edge of the Woods*, 1964. Oil on canvas, 30 x 39 in. Collection of the artist.

by Whistler at that point, that he allowed very little contrast, that he barely allowed the image to emerge from the painting activity.[241] Kahn's Tonalist predecessors in Venice, all of whom were influenced by Whistler, would include John Henry Twachtman, Robert Blum, Henry Muhrman, John Singer Sargent, William Gedney Bunce, and later, Henry Snell, Robert Henri, and Edward Redfield. All were affected by the Venetian light, much along the lines of the American expatriates of the 1870s and 1880s who, once enamored of the pearly gray skies of Brittany, remained beholden to similar lighting conditions on their return to America. Kahn, too, besotted by Italian light, sometimes struggled with the transition to American light. "The relation between the color of stony things—buildings and ground, and the surrounding foliage, is generally very balanced in Italy. The stony part of the landscape is abundant and brilliant, while the trees are scarce and often dark. In America we are not as fortunate, at least not in New England, where I have felt myself all summer living in the bottom of a salad bowl."[242] For this and other reasons, Kahn has often been drawn back to Italy and the American Southwest, and in New England, to the sparser seasons of spring and fall, and the softer light textures prevailing at dusk—the same microclimates that had inspired the Tonalists.

Like Avery, Kahn was less concerned with inherited tradition than with absorbing the quiddity of experience in the act of painting: "[M]y motto had always been 'follow the brush'—which is to say, let the work develop its own way, without too much intellectual scrutiny or control."[243] While in Venice, Kahn saw Rothko's work at the American Pavilion of the 1958 Biennale—previously, Kahn had found Rothko merely decorative—which further grounded his experience of tonal painting in terms of formalist concerns. "Formal relations in art most often concern the way areas on the surface affect each other; each color enhances the over-all color field, and each area affects the meaning of every other."[244] Later, Kahn would describe his approach to landscape, in which everything had to make sense to the eye, as "doing Rothko over from nature." Kahn's attraction to soft-edged, delicately modulated forms also explains his infatuation with the minimalist still lifes of the Italian Tonalist Georgio Morandi (1890–1964), an artist much on Kahn's mind during his two-year Italian sojourn. In the years since, Kahn has avidly collected the monochromatic etchings of the Italian master.

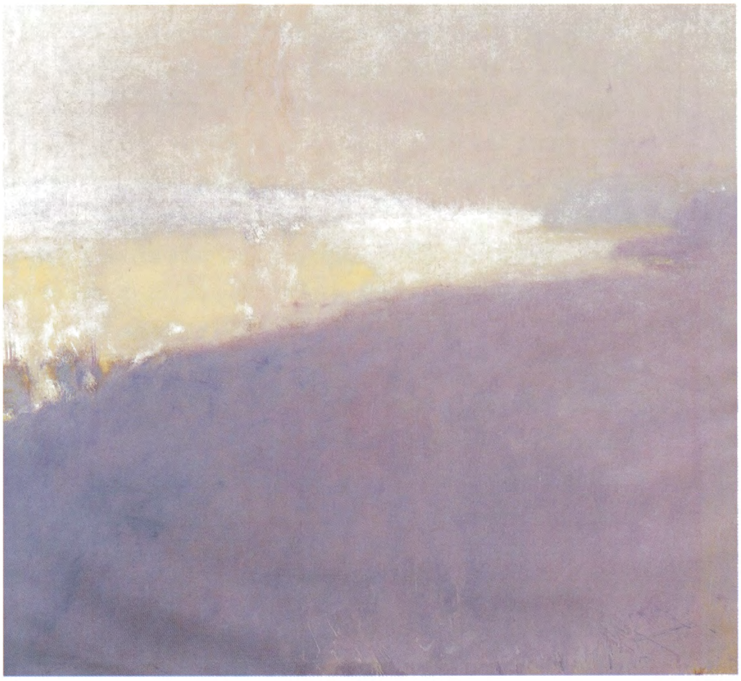


Fig. 8.159. Wolf Kahn, *Sunset*, 1967. Oil on canvas, 44 x 48 in. Collection of Judy Black Schlossburg.

On his return to America, Kahn and his wife, the artist Emily Trumbull Mason (the couple had been married in Venice), spent their next six summers in various retreats on Deer Isle off the coast of Maine, Martha's Vineyard, and San Francisco, microclimates in which subtle light and palpable atmospheric effects further moved the artist toward a Tonalist palette. In the early 1960s, Kahn simplified his tonal color fields in order to strengthen their impact. These hard, spare renditions of flattened tree forms against thick scrims of heavily brushed pigment, such as in *Edge of the Woods*, 1964 (fig. 8.158), moved Kahn as far toward pure abstraction as he felt the need to go. But, again, the experience of light and air, especially the sunsets over Southwest Harbor on Deer Isle in Maine, encouraged him to allow more color into his paintings and expand his pictorial spaces. His color tones began to approximate the feel of space and the movement in and out of recessional distances. Kahn later noted the experimental impulse that had always galvanized his art: "How far could I go towards color without giving up Tonalism?...I wanted to have it both ways."[245] In *Sunset*, 1967 (fig. 8.159), painted in Southwest Harbor, Kahn has translated the atmosphere of Venice to the New England coastline, where gray fogs roll in off the sea and the air is saturated with brine and evanescent light—much as La Farge, Martin, and Twachtman had done at Newport a century before. Avery's quick and felicitous working methods may have encouraged Kahn to dispense with his heavily brushed, impastoed canvases of the early 1960s and their emphasis on frontality, and develop a lighter more spontaneous touch, allowing his pigments to soak into the canvas or lie in hazy fields of softly brushed color over variegated undertones; consciously or serendipitously Kahn developed a modernist rendering of the thin opalescent glazes used by his Tonalist forebears, as well as variations on the thin overlapping washes Whistler had used to approximate the foggy Thames. Notably, Kahn prefers to conceptualize such technical issues less in terms of the vibration and refraction of tones—turn-of-the-century terminology with which he is unfamiliar—and more along the lines of balancing opacity and transparency (openness, transparency, and density), or allowing concentrated saturated areas of color to "sound off" against each other.[246] In Kahn's landscapes of 1967 and after, nearness and farness are described in terms of complementary color tones—much as Avery had done, though in Kahn's case the tones are often chromatically different, often dramatically so, from realistic depictions of local colors. Yet the color relationships the eye understands to be there are still there, revealing the landscape anew, shining forth with a mystery at once brilliant yet strangely subdued, an austerity shouted literally to the treetops. Kahn's transformations of nature present the viewer not only with visual paradox, but with a kind of parallel universe, a world of hazy, glowing color in which the natural relationships of form within space are distilled on the canvas into something approaching a haunting hyperreality. Such uses of unusual color combinations, exploiting complementary tonal relationships, often pushed to volatile levels on the chromatic scale, was a method that served Kahn well, and which he pursued with relish in the following decades.

From a modernist stance of formalist exploration, Kahn tapped into veins similar to what Inness had done in his attempts to fathom Swedenborgian realms of otherworldly light. Inness was seeking a spiritual world more splendid than the everyday. Kahn's landscapes can be no less otherworldly and feeling-fueled, though the feeling is more about the artistic process itself. In a recent interview, he reflected on Inness: "I was aware of Inness; what I liked wasn't his Tonalism so much but the ambiguity, that he wanted to express ambiguity and mystery, and that his focus was both broad and narrowed to a few details. I liked the way he set up an entire painting to capture the slant of light into the side of a tree."[247] As has been discussed, ambiguity, uncertainty, and mystery were key to the development of the Tonalist aesthetic, inherent in the use of soft-edged forms, pellucid atmosphere, and abstract symbolic form. Again, Kahn comes to a similar aesthetic stance from very different starting points: the point of convergence occurs in the creative flux of both artists' commitment to and mastery of the craft of painting. Seeing rightly or, as Kahn puts it, "to indulge in paradox" and "embrace ambiguity," is crucial to the artist's working methods. "If the artist doesn't articulate the exact place where things exist, he must substitute a generalized mass from which details emerge to lead the eye into the distance."[248] The middle ground in landscape, for Kahn, is often the locus of mystery, the battleground of transparency and density "between defining its volume to be composed by *objects* (tree trunks, foliage, or branches moving away from the eye), and keeping it ambiguous, hazy, unformed, and undefined. I think of this mass as the 'excluded middle.' The near and the far should be where we can comfortably exist, while the excluded middle allows the fantasy to roam."[249]

Although Kahn and Inness might approach their art from very different spiritual stances, their dedication to the crafting of art that communicates feeling is remarkably similar. Kahn's resonant imagery is reminiscent of Inness's remarks on the "subtle essence which exists in all things of the material world, and which addresses eloquently, through the senses, the human consciousness, creating an intellectual perception of niceties of relation, of peculiarities of condition, and constituting an atmosphere about the bald detail of facts. These elements the artistic mind is continually engaged in endeavoring to give men sensuous apprehension of, and thus to speak to them of that which is unseen. . . ."[250] Such effusions of strong emotions—what often got Inness into such trouble when translated into paint—do not sit well with Kahn, who insists that emotion emerges from the art process. "Painterly quality and beauty is a byproduct of getting something right. If you strive for beauty, your goose is cooked."[251]

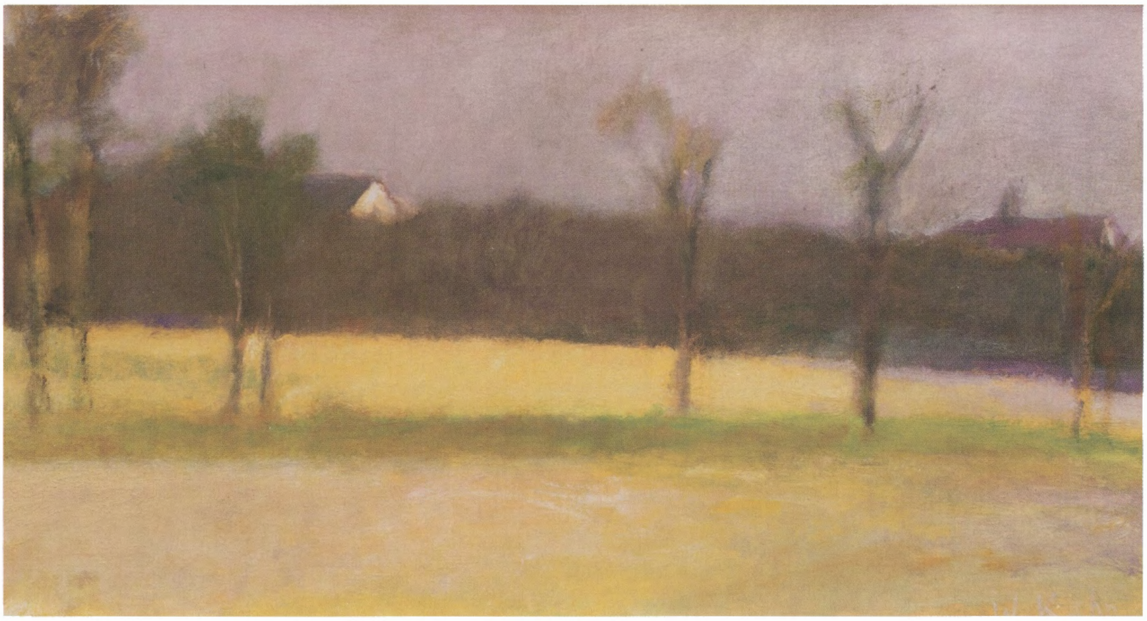


Fig. 8.160. Wolf Kahn, *Rooftop Treeline*, 1973. Oil on canvas, 12 x 24 in. Private collection.

Kahn's paintings of the late 1960s and 1970s display a sensuous aura, hinting always at vagrant shadows and flickering light, and, in the growing gestural vibrancy of the artist's brushstrokes and carefully matched tones, the unseen process of metamorphosis as one moment elides into the next. This achievement partially resulted from the artist's intuitive elucidation of the subtle interpenetration of forms—the lost-edge technique, in nineteenth-century terminology—as they create three-dimensional atmospheric space. In *Rooftop Treeline*, 1973 (fig. 8.160), detail is repressed, figures are absent, forms are generalized and their symbolic and spatial relationships are ambiguous enough, or quirky enough, that the viewer is equally puzzled and entranced. It is this mystery of soft-edged spatial relationships that invites the viewer to participate visually in the artwork, with the hope of resolving the irresolvable ambiguities. Like so many American artists before him, Kahn found himself drawn to New England's intimate and civilized landscape, replete with nostalgic references, which, for Kahn, posed a paradoxical temptation: how to avoid the banal and picturesque, the simply beautiful, while indulging the spiritual and inspiriting energies the landscape presents the receptive eye.

Kahn, like many artists in his generation, had taken a virtual vow of poverty in pursuit of his calling, only to realize that his luminous tonal landscapes found an instant appeal in contemporary collecting circles. Modernist critics might scoff that this was because of his return to more traditional and recognizable subject matter, but it may well be that Kahn's commercial success—much to the chagrin of the artist—is only another tantalizing reminder of America's deep cultural affinity for soft-edged, spiritually infused landscape art. Kahn and his artist wife, Emily Trumbull Mason, an abstract painter and daughter of the important second-generation Abstract Expressionist Alice Trumbull Mason, bought a Vermont farm in 1968. (Alice had objected to her daughter's marriage to Kahn on the grounds that he was a representational painter.) The farm has provided Kahn with, in his words, the "corrective" for his mostly studio-bound painting—the old barn on the property, the steep rugged hillside pastures with their abrupt vertical thrusts, and the dramatic views of tree lines generating much of the seminal imagery for the artist during the last forty years. Like his Tonalist forbears, Kahn's attachment to a rural homestead deepened his sense of place and challenged him to delve into the formal complexities of the well known and loved. Similar to the pattern followed by J. Francis Murphy and Dwight Tryon, Kahn began a seasonal rotation between Vermont and New York, returning to his city studio each fall with pastels and oils ready to be reworked into finished paintings. Kahn, whose early peripatetic life provided him many valuable visual lessons, found in his Vermont hermitage the enduring relationship to the land, the habitual, seasonal, and recurring palimpsest of memory that inspired artists and writers from Henry David Thoreau to Marcel Proust to Robert Frost. Much of his early acclaim was focused on his series of barn paintings, first inspired by the old barn on his property, which he turned into a studio for his wife, and thus it served double duty as work space and aesthetic inspiration.

Guildford Grange, November in Vermont, 1973 (fig. 8.161), exemplifies many of Kahn's barn paintings, combining an identifiably representational motif with a dizzying array of color schemes and angles of formalist approach. Hofmannesque imperatives for a dynamic push-pull in space, especially between hard- and soft-edged areas of color, are apparent throughout the painting. Receding picture planes move

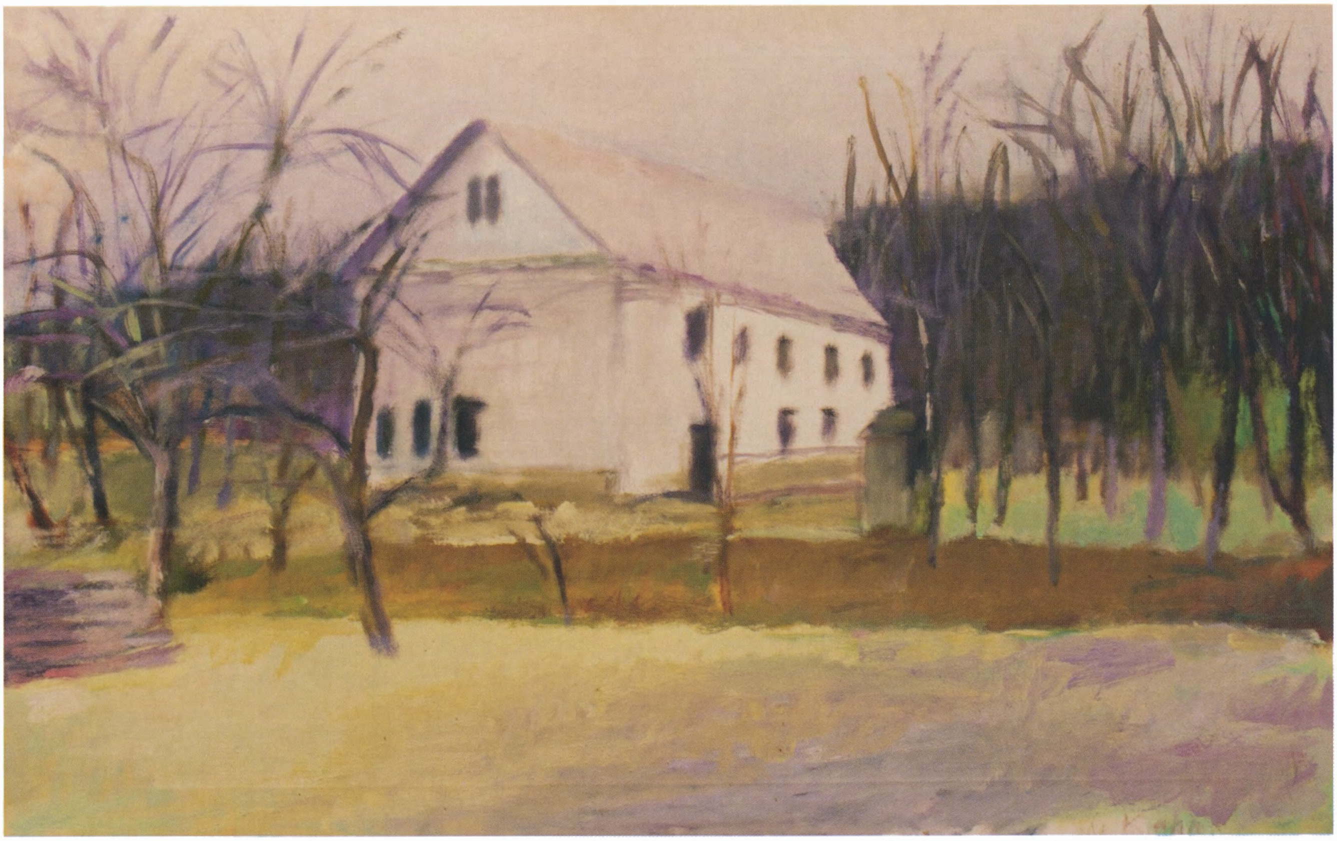


Fig. 8.161. Wolf Kahn, *Guildford Grange, November in Vermont*, 1973. Oil on canvas, 30 x 48 in. Private collection.

forward and back or lie flat on the canvas surface as pure paint marks; the barren trees consisting of energized color scribbles describe a crazy quilt of interpenetrating spaces, while the highlighted side of the structure is given scintillating life by exposing the negative white ground of the canvas. Saturated color and full-bodied impasto enliven the surface texture. Kahn manages to amalgamate profoundly serious investigations of pictorial form and color construction with an underlying emotional tenor that is unequivocally nostalgic, right down to the outhouse in the foreground. About this, Kahn makes no apologies. He is matter-of-fact about the inescapable symbolic resonance of the vernacular barn to an American eye. "[It is] a monument to the best American impulses: generosity, usefulness, permanency. . . . Nostalgia in the best sense, i.e., a yearning after a golden age, informs most of the best landscape painting... it's most clearly evident in Poussin and Lorrain, in Turner and Constable in a more homely key, and very strong in 19th-century American landscape painting—Ryder, Blakelock, Inness. . . . We in America don't have any antiquity, so for us there is only 18th- and 19th-century rural nostalgia. It was then we had our heroic age, and a New England barn is to us as a Greek temple was to Poussin, a symbol of a whole tradition, laden with all kinds of good associations."[252] Here is another echo of what Charles de Kay had championed in American Tonalism a hundred years before: a native art that touches on the inherent sentiment—but not sentimentality—of the near-at-home landscape, the spiritual basis of an enduring art at once individual and universal.

Kahn's impulse to simplicity and the centrality of symbolic form in stark and saturated colors is yet another reiteration of the arc of simplification and re-concentration of nature's energies found in the history of the Tonalist movement. This is especially true in the transition from Aesthetic Tonalism in the 1880s to Expressive Tonalism around the turn of the century, culminating in an art of broad graphic forms and patterned armatures both rhythmic and decorative. Such indulgence comes with a warning. Simplicity, writes Kahn, is not to be strived for, "it must appear unbidden and unheralded. Perhaps it is useful to think of it as a by-product. . . . A conscious drive for simplicity most often leads to false simplicity. If there are calculations of aesthetics, of style, a desire to eliminate or to be 'abstract,' the result, after things have been eliminated, is parsimony, insufficiency, spiritual poverty, and we want to avoid all of that. So simplicity is a surprise gift."[253] In *Edge of Clearing*, 1987 (fig. 8.162), Kahn has taken a motif—a horizontal scrim of tree trunks—often exploited by Tonalists from Inness to Charles Warren Eaton, and reduced it to essentials by cropping and compressing the image, and stressing the horizontal bands of color broken up by verticals, creating an eerie ambiguity of space relations. In *River Mosaic*, circa 1990 (fig. 8.163), Kahn compresses his horizontals even more dramatically, forcing out the inherent structural patterns. The setting of foreground

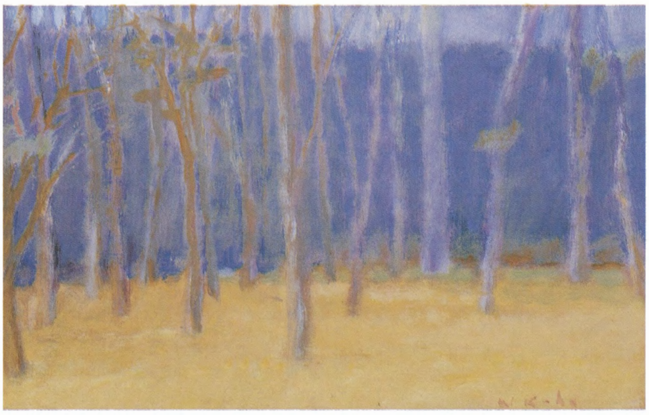


Fig. 8.162. Wolf Kahn, *Edge of Clearing*, 1987. Oil on canvas, 14 x 22 in. Private collection.

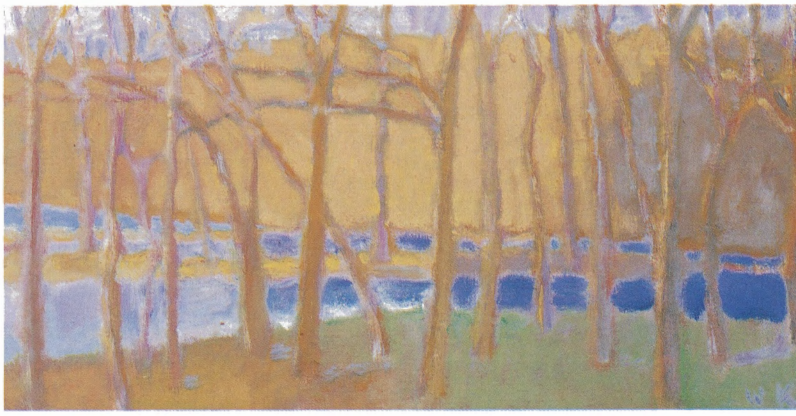


Fig. 8.163. Wolf Kahn, *River Mosaic*, c. 1990. Oil on canvas, 12 x 24 in. Private collection.

trunks acts like fretwork on the horizontal color planes to produce a patchwork of lozenge-shaped apertures that challenge the eye to constantly rebuild this rugged landscape, a landscape that both recedes and hovers on the plane of the canvas: in the mind's eye it is like a crumbling stonewall forever needing to be restacked.

The underlying integrity of Kahn's often gritty vision—the less consciousness the better, that insights are discovered *in medias res* and cannot be imposed by conscious endeavor—speaks to a kind of Puritan iconoclasm found in Whistler and Inness. The moment of epiphany must be prepared for by hard work. It is a thoroughly inductive stance, an empirical approach that Thoreau or Darwin would have respected for its fidelity to the world of things as they are, and to the creative cycles that allow the new to be birthed from the decayed body of the old. Kahn says, "I've read Emerson and I'm immediately drawn to him. A lot of Emily Dickinson I've learned by heart and I'm drawn to her, and it's the same thing as Ryder: the attempt to make the thing as bare and simple as possible...no subterfuges at all."[254] Kahn's work embodies the same gravitational attraction to unaffected primal utterance—achieved with resonate tonality and natural form in Kahn's case—that motivated the first-generation New York school of Abstract Expressionists.

What Inness might have called "unseen" powers, Kahn prefers to think of in more conceptual terms, as the energies of the artist simply mimicking the energies in nature, a convergence, or harnessing, of cause and effect that vitalizes his best work. Such forces are often glimpsed in his ranks of hovering, sometimes disembodied tree lines, sometimes a crazy quilt of broken calligraphy or near seamless tones, often seething with metamorphic vibrations that purposely animate his rough-and-tumble assemblages. The fluid dynamics of his negative and positive spaces, most pronounced at dusk in his overgrown Vermont pastures, can be positively hallucinogenic. *Edge of the Trees*, circa 1993 (fig. 8.164), is an austere simplification and virtuoso deployment of low-toned colors to activate Kahn's painted surface, bringing to vibrant, even eerie life what at a distance seems like a schematic abstraction made up of three swaths of pure color. Here, too, Kahn's activated pigment surfaces often present an analogue to the nature he depicts, a simulacrum of the process of metamorphosis inherent in both seasonal change and the long-term cycles of creation and extinction. Although deeply skeptical of the imposition of emotional states on the process of composition, Kahn readily acknowledges the symbiotic relationship of man, nature, and the flow of creative energies that unite them. "I like the word 'energy.' It bypasses generalization and relates directly to nature, our own, as well as external nature. For landscape, it seems especially appropriate because, in the idea of nature, there exists not only energy everywhere, but atmosphere and volume. Any part of the image where these elements are missing cannot truly represent nature. If there is redundancy, if there are leftovers, there is a slackening in the overall field of energy."[255] Kahn's feeling for movement, of metamorphosis and energy in his landscapes, echoes the mystical raptures expressed by Thoreau, Emerson, and Darwin in their painstaking explorations of nature and the human mind, as well as their nineteenth-century counterparts who, by allowing their instinctive desires to be fully engaged, recaptured something of the subliminal inheritance of their earliest ancestors. By giving voice to the song of the winds in paint, something of this preliterate relationship between the perceiver and the perceived is recaptured and preserved, a circumstance Kahn's teacher, modernist guru and abstract painter Hans Hofmann, found essential to the creative process. "Every medium has a life of its own. . . . A creative mind senses and uses this life to produce pictorial motion. Motion reflects the impulses from which it has arrived. . . . Pictorial motion, therefore, reflects the impulses which the mind receives from visual experience. All forces that animate the creative act go through a process of enlightened spiritual digestion."[256] Such a sensual response to motion—seasonal, cyclical, possibly the intuited exchange of energy on the quantum level—reflects a

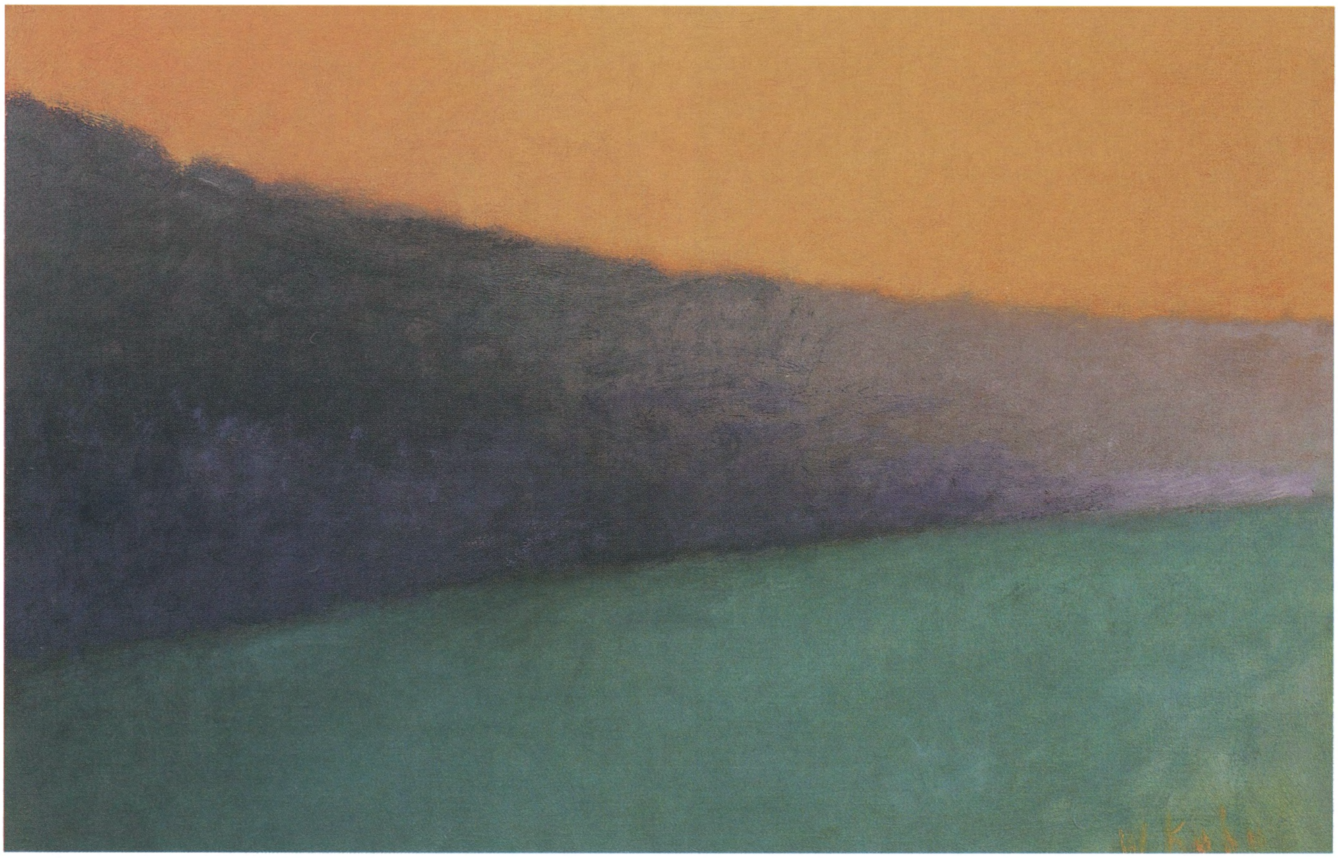


Fig. 8.164. Wolf Kahn, *Edge of the Trees*, c. 1993. Oil on canvas, 18 x 28 in. Private collection.

universal response to the metamorphic life of nature and an enduring value informing the Tonalist repertoire.

Yellow Gold, 1991 (fig. 8.165), compresses Kahn's signature tree row into near two-dimensional planar space, much along the lines of what Tryon, an artist Kahn much admires, had achieved a hundred years earlier. "What I like in Tryon is the haze that he always manages to get and the fact that he painted those tree rows which I saw everywhere; it seemed to me to be a very worthy subject, especially since I was trying to paint very formalist paintings, with very strong verticals and horizontals."[257] In addition to the bold patterning of trees against flat hills and sky, and the decorative beauty of design, *Yellow Gold* imparts a mystical sense of invisible forces at play, especially in the shifting, low-toned foreground forms that refuse to quite reveal their structure to the eye. These quiet, austere, yet deeply expressive landscapes often bring to mind the Bavarian landscapes of J. Frank Currier of a hundred years before. Kahn employs a higher range of chromatic color than Currier or his contemporaries ever dreamed of, and much of Kahn's radicalism and concentrated power of symbolic imagery is achieved by the use of striking color combinations, yet color modulated and unified by the time-tested method of vibration and refraction of sympathetic tones. "I'm always trying to get to a danger point in color, where color either becomes too sweet or it becomes too harsh, it becomes too noisy or too quiet, and at that point I still want the picture to be strong, forceful, and the carrier of everything that a painting has to have: contrast, drama, austerity."[258] Here is another echo of Millet's doctrine that the key to a great painting lies in its value structure—Kahn's pictorial logic, which in turn conjures a contemplative mood in the viewer.

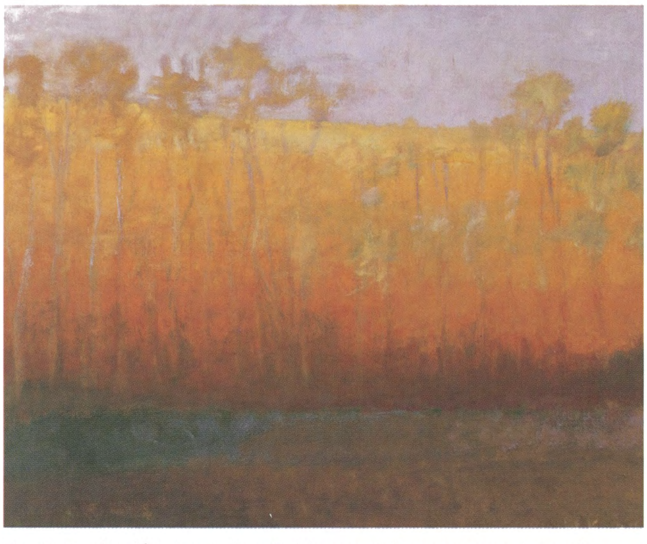


Fig. 8.165. Wolf Kahn, *Yellow Gold*, 1991. Oil on canvas, 28 x 32 in. Private collection.

Notably, three of Kahn's favorite nineteenth-century painters were also favorites of Charles de Kay. "I responded

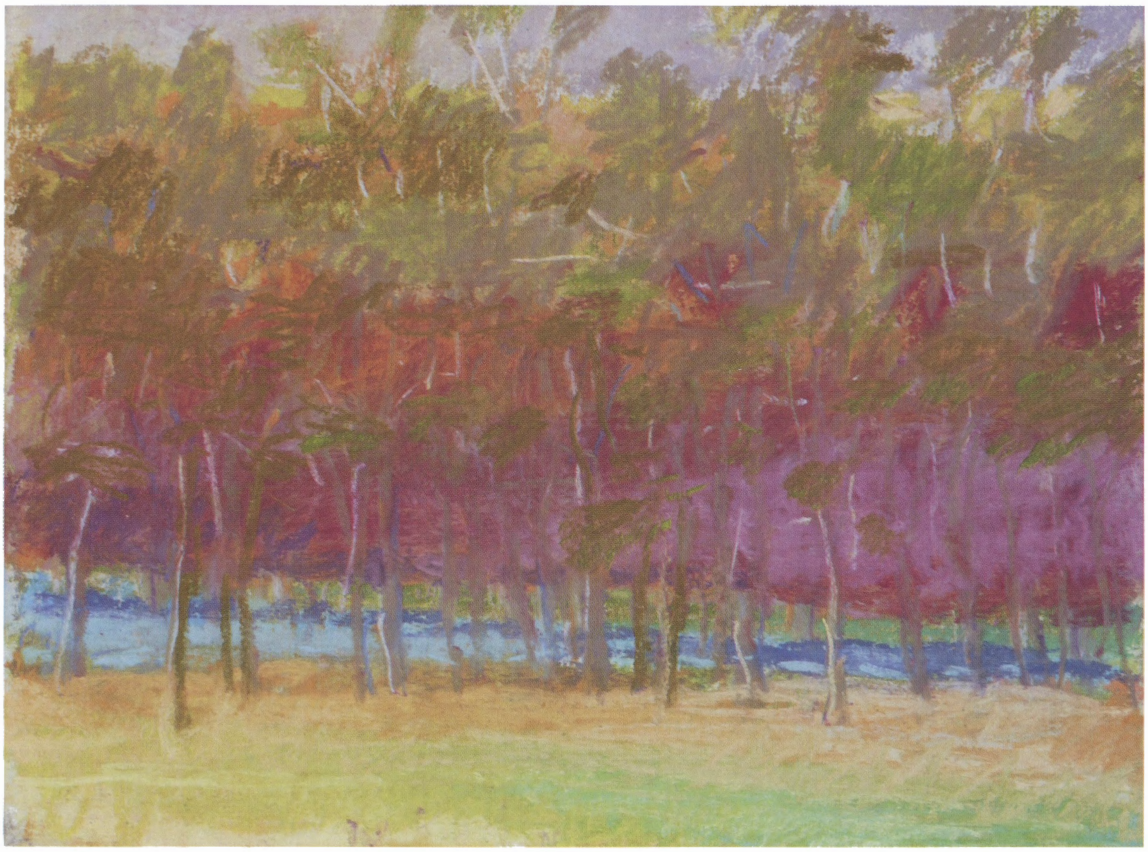


Fig. 8.166. Wolf Kahn, *Midsummer*, 1993. Pastel, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

to Ryder because he painted so heavy, and that he responded to a certain quality of light that was different in each painting, and that he was so simple in his forms. Blakelock is another one of my heroes; I like his work a lot; I like his rough grounds and how he painted into those. I like Murphy for his sense of beauty and great capacity for placing things in their right place."[259] Nor is it a coincidence that these Tonalists were masters of surface quality and texture, often seeking tactile correspondences in paint for the rawness of nature, something Kahn greatly enjoys but is careful not to try appropriate for its own sake. "Surface quality is an unconscious interest. I can't consider a painting done until it has a certain amount of pigmentation going on. That paint is not there for its own sake but because I make mistakes and have to keep going over the same stuff again and again. Unless your painting has ten times as much stuff in it as you expected, you're not an artist."[260]

Kahn, a master pastelist, has quietly updated this subtlest of mediums from its roots in nineteenth-century American Tonalism. His Tryonesque tree lines in particular have served him well, especially in the formal complexities that allow for near-infinite explorations of pattern structure, rhythm of symbolic form, and counterpoint of translucence and density of tonal surfaces. His pastels vary in intensity and scale from the ethereal harmonies of a Mozart quartet—Kahn's father was the conductor of the Stuttgart Philharmonic Orchestra before World War II—to a jazzy extravaganza of rollicking "scribble-scrabble" crayon marks. Pastels, both in terms of their compact size and the exquisite textures, "like dust on a butterfly's wing," allow Kahn to invoke the intimate realm of Aesthetic Tonalism in its heyday and, like his predecessors J. Frank Currier, Henry Muhrman, and Charles Fromuth, to ponder the ethereal essences of the spirit—the afterglow of imagination—that oils sometimes struggle to accommodate. Kahn's evolution as an artist has emerged from the near-infinite changes he has wrung from pastel. *Midsummer*, 1993 (fig. 8.166), and *May Tree Line*, 1993 (fig. 8.167), display the artist's development from the airily representational to the joyously decorative, to the boldly ephemeral and lushly symbolic. The movement is always in the direction of simplicity, pictorial coherence and logic, and last, but far from least, a moment of insight that is as much a part of the work in progress as the inspiration that prompted the insight in the first place. Kahn states, "I believe, above all, that art exists to celebrate, exalt, excite, and satisfy the demands of the visual. The mind of politics, of virtue, of God, of social progress, even of self-expression, are secondary. The eye reigns."[261] These words embody the Whistlerian quest.

Kahn's work demonstrates that the dark-toned aesthetic of turn-of-the-century Tonalism can find a modern-day equivalence—decorative, symbolic, poignant, and deeply expressive—even when employing a dramatically raised

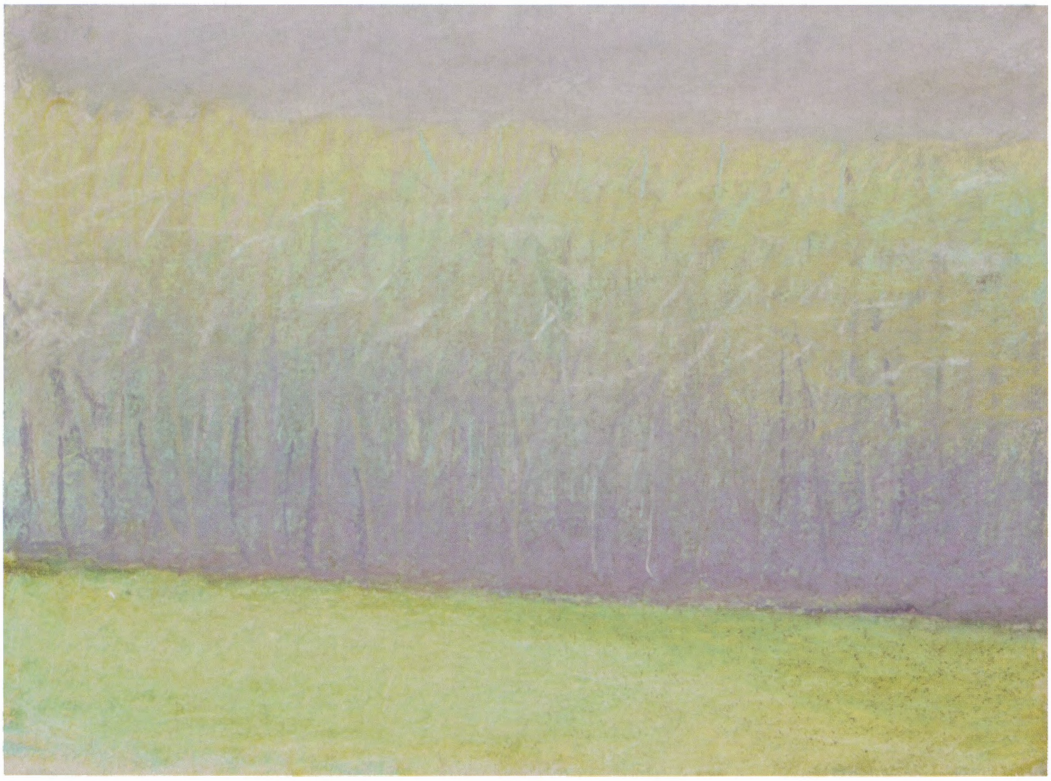


Fig. 8.167. Wolf Kahn, *May Tree Line*, 1993. Pastel, 9 x 12 in. Private collection.

chromatic scale of color, as in the oil *Brilliant Green Trees*, 1997 (fig. 8.168). Although his colors—often verging on the electric and chemically astringent—are brighter than those of the artist's predecessors, Kahn is careful not to push for the merely shocking. "My knowledge of tonality keeps even the wilder colors from going off into Never-Never Land. I don't want circus colors. There's got to be a certain austerity."[262] The painter Louis Finkelstein has written of Kahn's innovative use of color and the way in which the artist achieves his effects even when dispensing entirely with the local colors that the observer expects to find in a scene: "[Kahn's] artistry is not in matching a given color, but rather in matching its effect: its luminosity, its weight, its modification of the colors around it, its chromatic distance from them, and its plastic function. The matching is never a literal one, and the effects created are emotional and thematic."[263]

It was only late in his career that Kahn discovered his affinity for the earlier generation of Tonalists, titling work in homage to Dwight Tryon and others. Most critical writing about Kahn's work has failed to notice the link to turn-of-the-century Tonalism, much less how deeply the Tonalist aesthetic is embedded in the modernist movement. Even the many laudatory critics find Kahn hard to place among modernist artists because of his representational subject matter and the odd but tangible echo in his work of an older school of American landscape art. Many describe Kahn's work in terms of Impressionism and late Monet and Bonnard but do not mention the ways in which Kahn has fundamentally revolutionized an older, essentially American tradition by employing high-keyed color as a means to abstraction, while retaining much of the mood and feeling of his low-toned predecessors. The critic Lawrence Campbell, writing in the early 1980s, though lacking the larger perspective of the Tonalist movement, understood Kahn's modernist dilemma. "Color relationships are abstractions, and all genuine art has always been abstract. There are numerous painters who, like Kahn, paint pictures of 'simple nature'—but how many are interested in a color relationship which approaches disharmony and is only made harmonious by the presence of other colors acting as a go-between? Such relationships may be new and unseen by anybody before, and therefore ... create a new *frisson* of originality. In these color relationships, Kahn merits a direct confrontation with Rothko, but since Kahn is labeled a realist or an impressionist by museum curators, it is unlikely that such a meeting will ever take place—at least not in his lifetime."[264] Kahn has pushed the boundaries of Tonalism and demonstrated that the visual emotions embodied in the lower tones of the chromatic scale can find a concomitant emotional equivalent at the higher end. Low or high, the underlying activation of energy—vibration, refraction, and metamorphosis—remains constant, and mysterious, an ineffable presence that we respond to as to the touch of a beloved.

Now, with a fuller understanding of the Tonalist movement available, the achievement of Kahn and his fellow postmodern Tonalists can be fully appreciated not only for what they have added to the tradition but also for the ways in which the essential elements of the tradition, especially the continuity of shared spiritual values, have continued to well up like an underground stream, replenishing the inspiration of one generation after the next. This is our common birthright. The landscape remains the fountainhead of abstraction and symbol making. It endures as the inescapable source of ultimate meaning for our collective humanity. It is the shared meeting ground where past and present exist as one.

As Kahn has written of his own landscape discoveries, it is nature's purity that makes for a profundity of spiritual insights. These insights move even beyond Emersonian subjectivity to a more all-encompassing and beneficial relationship based on a stewardship of the land: a treasuring of nature's bounty rather than the blind exploitation of its resources. "Landscape, of all representational modes, seems to me to be the least affected by fashion, politics, trends...[T]hrough our investigation of landscape we can express our sense of the connectedness of things, where we stand in relation to them. Above all, we come in touch with those over-arching abstractions that govern our perceptions: the great and small, near and far, up and down, sharp and soft, smooth and rough. None of this is likely to change soon.... People mistakenly think that art is about nature, or about an artist's feelings about nature. It is instead a path to enlightenment and pleasure, one of many paths, where nature and the artist's feelings are merely the raw materials."[265]

In this, Kahn echoes the sentiments of his artistic ancestors, Thoreau, Inness, Wyant, and Tryon, and most especially the Tonalist generation of 1840–1865, the generation that first realized the true glory of its birthright: the intimate landscape and the life and spiritual resources it sustained. The Tonalist movement drew strength and character from nature, while inspiring a new respect for the preservation of the artists' landscape heritage—as near as Walden Pond or as far as the cypress-clad hills of Monterey. All that is wild and free. In art as in life, Thoreau's admonition echoes down the wind: "In Wildness is the preservation of the World."

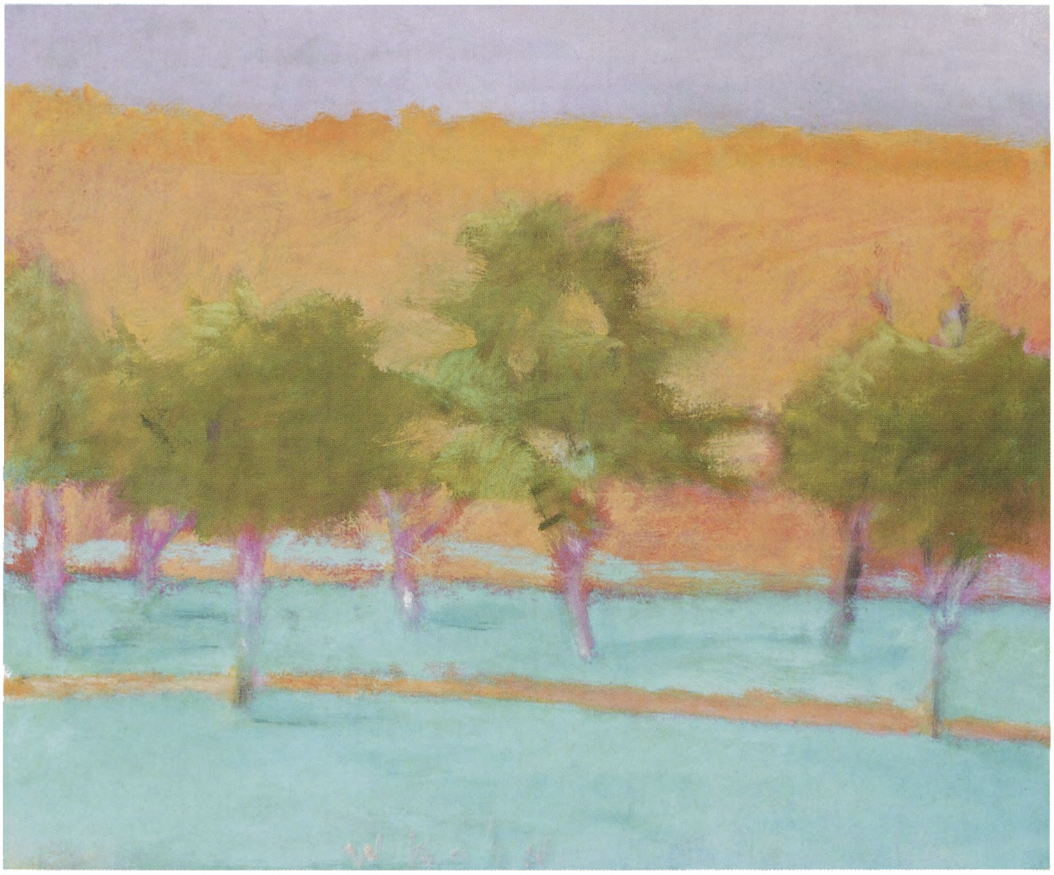
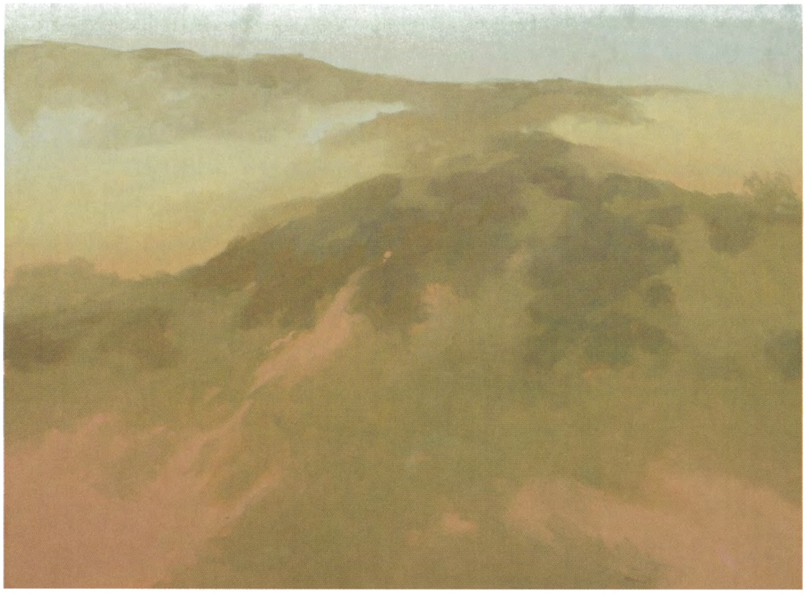
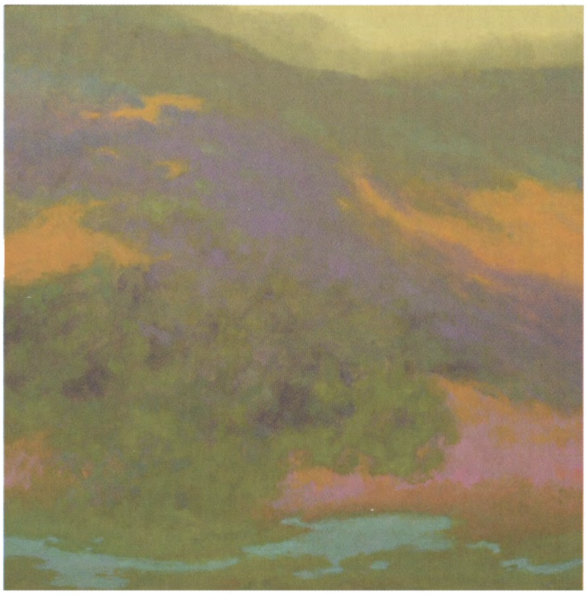


Fig. 8.168. Wolf Kahn, *Brilliant Green Trees*, 1997. Oil on canvas, 18 x 22 in. Private collection.



Richard Mayhew, *Misty Mystic*. Oil on canvas, 30 × 40 in. Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York.



Richard Mayhew, *Above and Beyond*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 48 × 48 in. Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York.

Richard Mayhew (1924–)

It seems only fitting to end this third edition with an all too brief mention of an extraordinary Tonalist artist, Richard Mayhew, who had escaped my attention until now. Mayhew, drawing on his deep roots in both the African American and Native American communities on Long Island (his grandparents were Shinnecock and Montauk, his mother was Cherokee) developed an abstract landscape style that draws on both historical Tonalism and his ethnic heritage and spiritual ties to the land. Mayhew was drawn to George Inness's soft-edged mysterious landscapes with their layers of transparent glazes, a technique he employs to breathtaking effect in his own work. "As a young artist I was working on Madison Avenue and I saw Inness's work for the first time in a gallery. I would go to the galleries along Madison Avenue and I would want to see his work; the gallery owners were very sympathetic and would invite me in so that I could study his work."

Another early influence was his teacher at the art school of the Brooklyn Museum, the third-generation tonalist Edwin Dickinson (1891–1978). "His work was mystical; he taught me how to make color out of tonal space." The artist has driven across the country six times and spent much of his early career traveling though New England and upstate New York, but eventually settled in California with its multitudinous array of landscapes—everything a landscape artist could ask for. Yet, like his Tonalist forebearers, Mayhew is less interested in specific places and more in the spiritual apprehension of the life force inherent in the land. "The spiritual quality of my creative consciousness, however, emerges from both [his African American and Native American heritage]. I have always been fascinated with that. What value does ethnicity have to do with one's universal creative consciousness? But the influence of place and environment and community play into the creative consciousness. The unique sensibility of the creative mind-set is an important quality. The ethnicity is more emotional than identifying with a particular group. My mindscapes are also about the healing of that long trauma that the black and the native communities have experienced collectively."

Mayhew, who has also had a long and distinguished career of teaching interdisciplinary studies at the university level, brings a wide range of cultural insights to his work as well. His paintings vividly explore both physical and emotional space—expressions rooted in a unique sensibility. His atmospheric, supersaturated landscapes are stirring spiritual metaphors that touch on our shared humanity. "In the course of doing my paintings, I do not plan ahead of time. I put some color on the canvas, and it develops based on my experience of the landscape. It is intuitive. I work for a time and then go back, and there might be a completely different feeling. The landscape changes. So it is a feeling, and it changes with the moment. This is my process. And it is . . . my belief in the creative consciousness that drives my process. I work from the inside (emotion) to the outside (the landscape)."[266]

List of Artists: The Three Generations

A History of American Tonalism is organized as a chronological narrative that follows the development of the Tonalist movement through the finest work of the best artists over the course of three generations. These three generations—the founding, the prime (core), and the transitional generations—thus underpin the contextual framework of *A History of American Tonalism* and hopefully provide a vivid illustration of the continuities and deep bench strength of the Tonalist movement. The following list is both a convenient guide to the artists included and a capsule glimpse of their extraordinary cohesiveness as a group.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list. There were hundreds if not thousands of artists working in a Tonalist mode during the period from 1880 to 1920 and beyond. But these are the finest. Most are featured and well illustrated in *A History of American Tonalism*, while some receive only a brief mention. The following criteria were used in the selection: 1) artists who worked primarily in a Tonalist landscape style; 2) artists whose work as a whole was distinctive, innovative, and independent of European academic models; 3) artists who maintained a high degree of quality and individual integrity of vision during the larger portion of their career, that is, whose work did not suffer from an excess of commercialism or banal repetition of a signature style; and 4) artists who won respect from their peers in terms of memberships and prizes, along with the accolades of the best critics of the day.[1]

Almost all of the artists on the list who were born before 1865 were members of the Society of American Artists or the New York Water Color Club, the two most prestigious and selective artistic groups of the period. Most of them also belonged to the Lotos Club and the Salmagundi Club, and many to the Century Club. With a few exceptions, the first- and second-generation artists were members of the National Academy of Design, certainly after its amalgamation with the Society of American Artists in 1906; most were also members of the American Watercolor Society. More than eighty percent of the artists lived and worked in or nearby New York City before 1905, the rest in or near Boston, and a few in London, Paris, or elsewhere. Never before or since have such a number of major artists painting in a similar style lived, worked, socialized, and exhibited in such close proximity. The coherence and consistency of the Tonalist movement was due in no small measure to this closeness and the shared values of the artists and their patrons. Charles de Kay, the most respected critic of his day and a central voice in this narrative, praised most of those listed below (born before 1865), some lavishly. With occasional lapses, his judgments have held up well over time.

Abbreviations:
Society of American Artists: SAA
National Academy of Design: NA
New York Water Color Club: NYWCC
Century Club or Century Association: CC
Lotos Club: LC
Salmagundi Club: SC
National Institute of Arts and Letters: NIAL

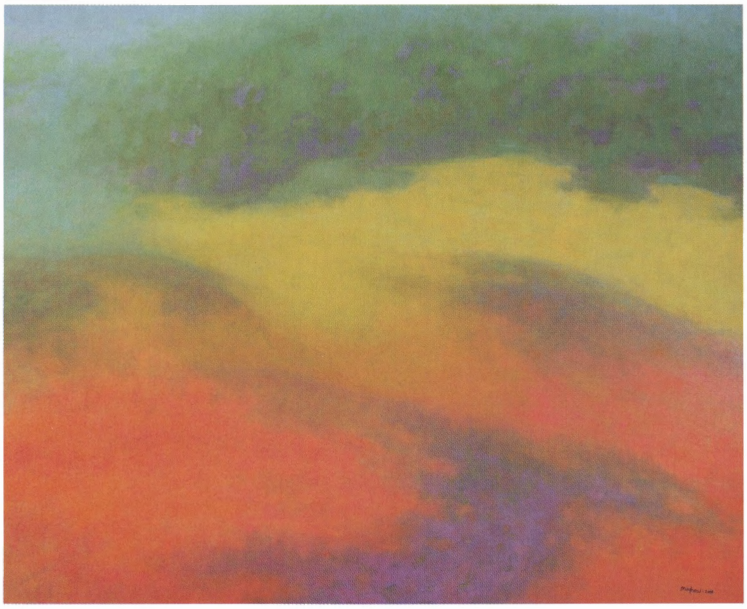
First Generation or Founding Generation (godfathers of the Tonalist movement): Born before 1840

George Fuller (1822–1884): SAA, 1880; NA
William Morris Hunt (1824–1879): NA
George Inness (1825–1894): SAA; NA; CC
James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903): SAA, 1886
John La Farge (1835–1910): SAA, 1877 (founding member); NA; NYWCC; CC
Alexander Wyant (1836–1892): SAA, 1878; NA; NYWCC; CC
Homer Dodge Martin (1836–1897): SAA; NA; CC

Second Generation or Prime (Core) Generation: Born between 1840 and 1865

Winslow Homer (1836–1910)[2]: NA; CC
Robert Crannell Minor (1839–1904): SAA, 1887; NA; LC; SC
Robert Swain Gifford (1840–1905): SAA, 1877; NA; CC
William Gedney Bunce (1840–1916): SAA, 1877; NA; LC; NIAL
George Henry Smillie (1840–1921): NA; CC; LC; SC
J. Frank Currier (1843–1909)
William Sartain (1843–1924): SAA, 1877; NA
John Appleton Brown (1844–1902): SAA, 1892; NA; NYWCC
Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847–1919): NA
Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847–1917): SAA, 1877; NA; NIAL
Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1847–1928): SAA, 1880; NA; LC
Hugh Bolton Jones (1848–1927): SAA, 1881; NA; CC; SC; NIAL
Emil Carlsen (1848–1932): SAA, 1902; NA; NYWCC; CC; LC; SC; NIAL
Frank Duveneck (1848–1919): SAA, 1880; NA
Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848–1933): SAA, 1877; NA; CC.

William Merritt Chase (1849–1916): SAA, 1879; NA; LC; NIAL
Dwight Tryon (1849–1925): SAA, 1882; NA; NIAL
Charles Melville Dewey (1849–1937): SAA, 1881; NA; LC; NIAL
Abbott Thayer (1848–1921): SAA, 1879; NA; NIAL
Charles Harry Eaton (1850–1901)
Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851–1938): SAA; NA; NIAL
Ben Foster (1852–1926): SAA, 1897; NA; NYWCC; CC; LC; SC; NIAL
J. Alden Weir (1852–1919): SAA, 1878; NA; CC; LC; NIAL
Edward Emerson Simmons (1852–1931): NIAL
J. Francis Murphy (1853–1921): SAA; NA; CC; LC; SC
Alexander Harrison (1853–1930): SAA, 1885; NA; CC; NIAL
John Henry Twachtman (1853–1902): SAA, 1879
Henry Muhrman (1854–1916): SAA, 1886
Leonard Ochtman (1854–1934): SAA, 1891; NA; NYWCC; LC; SC; NIAL
Birge Harrison (1854–1929): SAA, 1882; NA; NYWCC; CC; SC; NIAL
Arthur Hoeber (1854–1915): SC; LC
Walter Lunt Palmer (1854–1932): SAA, 1881; NA; NYWCC; CC; SC
James Henry Moser (1854–1913): NYWCC; SC
William Anderson Coffin (1855–1925): SAA, 1886; NA; LC
Charles Augustus (Shorty) Lasar (1856–1936)
William Merritt Post (1856–1935): NYWCC; SC
John White Alexander (1856–1915): SAA, 1891; NA



Richard Mayhew, *Transgression*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 56 × 60 in. Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York.

Charles Harold Davis (1856–1933): SAA, 1886; NA; LC
Franklin De Haven (1856–1934): NA; SC
Charles Warren Eaton (1857–1937): NYWCC; LC; SC
Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922)
Joseph Pennell (1857–1926): NA; NIAL
Bruce Crane (1857–1937): SAA, 1881; NA; SC; LC
Alexander Van Laer (1857–1920): NA; NYWCC; SC; LC
Henry Snell (1858–1943): SAA, 1905; NA; NYWCC; SC; LC
Henry Ward Ranger (1858–1916): NA; LC
William Bliss Baker (1859–1886)
Elliot Daingerfield (1859–1932): SAA, 1903; NA; NYWCC; LC
William Lathrop (1859–1938): NA; NYWCC
Dennis Miller Bunker (1861–1890): SAA, 1885
Frederick W. Kost (1861–1923): SAA, 1889; NA; CC; LC
Walter Nettleton (1861–1936): SAA, 1901
Charles Fromuth (1861–1937)
Charles Adams Platt (1861–1933): SAA, 1888; NA; CC
Frederick Judd Waugh (1861–1940): NA
Arthur B. Davies (1862–1928): NYWCC
George Gardner Symons (1863–1930): NA; CC
Henry Golden Dearth (1864–1918): SAA, 1889; NA; CC; LC
Robert Henri (1865–1929): SAA, 1903; NA; NIAL
Leon Dabo (1865–1960)

Third Generation Tonalists or Transitional Generation: Born after 1865

Herman Dudley Murphy (1867–1945): NA
Chauncey Ryder (1868–1949): NA; NYWCC
Edward Willis Redfield (1869–1965): SAA, 1903; NA
John Marin (1870–1953)
August Vincent Tack (1870–1949)
John Fabian Carlson (1874–1945): NA; NYWCC; SC
Marsden Hartley (1877–1943)
Edward Steichen (1879–1973)
Arthur Dove (1880–1946)
Milton Avery (1885–1965)
Edwin Dickinson (1891–1978)
Ross Braught (1898–1983)
Mark Rothko (1903–1970)
Fairfield Porter (1907–1975)
Ralph Wickiser (1910–1998)
Richard Mayhew (1924–)
Wolf Kahn (1927–2020)
Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011)

Notes

INTRODUCTION (pp. xi–xxvii)

1. Henry David Thoreau, "Nature Essays": *Walking*, in *The Selected Works of Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975; Cambridge ed.), pp. 685–686.

2. Sadakichi Hartmann, *The Whistler Book* (Boston: L.C. Page & Co., 1910), pp. 94–95.

3. Ralcy Husted Bell, *The Philosophy of Painting* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), chap. 28, "Tonalism and Tonalists," p. 183. Bell had used the same language in his *Art Talks with Ranger* of 1914.

4. Ibid., p. 184.

5. Hartmann, *The Whistler Book,* p. 92.

6. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* November 20, 1904.

7. Bell used the term "Tonalism" in *Art Talks with Ranger* in 1914, and in *The Philosophy of Painting,* 1916, titling chapter 28 "Tonalism and Tonalists"; the critic, Sidney Allan, in *The Photographic Journal of America,* September 1915, p. 45, describes the work of an Italian photographer: "An individual temperament, no doubt, but strangely influenced by our tendency toward extreme tonalism." Allan implies that the Italian has been influenced by a particularly American style, though more likely the influence was Whistler.

8. Ripley Hitchcock, in an 1884 catalogue essay, "George Inness, N.A.," writes: "We know how tenderly he cares for the harmony of his subtle coloring, and we know that to keep the parts of his picture in tone is a matter of high importance to him." Quoted in Rachael DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 200. Contemporary exhibition reviews and announcements used the term: *New York Mail and Express,* February 2, 1902, review, "Lotus Club Shows Pictures by Thirty-nine of Its Members—Tonal Men and Others in Evidence." Clipping Lotos Club Scrapbooks, quoted in "Championing Tonal Painting: The Lotos Club," in Jack Becker, *The Poetic Vision: American Tonalism,* exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005). *New York Times,* February 2, 1905, review of William Sartain at Macbeth Galleries, "…the strength of a general harmoniousness as to tone." *New York Times,* February 2, 1905, review of Leonard Ochtman: "*Morning Symphony* is a fine big tonal landscape…." *New York Times,* February 27, 1910, review of William Sartain: "Mr. Sartain's habit of simplifying his masses and gaining justice of tone…." *New York Times,* December 12, 1908: review of William Sartain: "*The Cloud* by William Sartain, is a monochromatic picture warm in tone…." *New York Times,* December 12, 1908, review: "Mr. Inness's Paintings," *New York Evening Post,* April 15, 1884: "Mr. Inness, classed in respect to his color powers, must be considered as a tonalist, and whenever he attempts to leave this quality and venture into the higher power of colors he fails," quoted in DeLue, p. 201. Review of exhibition at the Union League Club: "…Blakelock's, with tawny rich glazes and a golden tonality…." *New York Times,* July 15, 1889, review: "The tones of this water color are magnificent… It is fine in tone and well painted throughout…" *New York Times,* April 2, 1911, review of painting by Arthur Hoeber at Katz Galleries: "Mr. Hoeber's earlier work was delicate in color, simple in theme, and allied to what we call in the slang of criticism the 'tonal' school." *New York Times,* review of William Macbeth (Macbeth Galleries) exhibition, February 2, 1893: "There are twenty-four landscapes by George Inness, A. H. Wyant, Robert C. Minor, H. W. Ranger, and J. Francis Murphy, all tonists, and each a painter with an individual style." George Inness, Jr., in his *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness* (New York: Kennedy Galleries and Da Capo Press, 1969), p. 133, uses the term: "My father was not over-enthusiastic about Corot, but thought he was a poet and a tonist."

9. Bell, *The Philosophy of Painting,* p. 179.

10. William Morris Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976; repr. of 1896 and 1898 editions [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co]; originally published in England as *Talks on Art,* 1878), p. 6.

11. Quoted in Helen M. Knowlton, *Art-Life of William Morris Hunt* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1899), p. 145.

12. George Inness, "A Painter on Painting," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 56 (February 1878): pp. 458–461. Repr. in Nicolai Cikovsky, *George Inness* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985), p. 205.

13. James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967; originally published 1892, William Heinemann, London), p. 143.

14. Bell, *The Philosophy of Painting,* p. 178.

CHAPTER ONE (pp. 1–33)

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature,* in *Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essay & Lectures,* edited by Joel Porte (The Library of America, 1983), p. 18.

2. Helen M. Knowlton, *Art-Life of William Morris Hunt* (Little, Brown, and Co. 1899), p. 5.

3. Quoted in Knowlton, *Art-Life of William Morris Hunt,* p. 7.

4. William Morris Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976; repr. of 1896 and 1898 editions [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co]; originally published in England as *Talks on Art,* 1878), p. vii.

5. Birge Harrison, *Landscape Painting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), pp. 5–7.

6. Henry David Thoreau, "Nature Essays": *Walking,* in *The Selected Works of Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975; Cambridge ed.), p. 669.

7. Harrison, *Landscape Painting,* pp. 42–43.

8. John La Farge, *The Higher Life in Art* (New York: The McClure Company, 1908), p. 7.

9. Ibid., p. 16.

10. Ibid., pp. 29–30.

11. Ibid., p. 87.

12. Ibid., p. 135.

13. Ibid., pp. 172–173.

14. Henry David Thoreau, "Nature Essay": *Walking,* in *The Selected Works of Thoreau,* p. 668.

15. Henry David Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals,* edited by Odell Shepherd (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), p. 219.

16. Knowlton, *Art-Life of William Morris Hunt,* p. 94.

17. Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* [*Talks on Art*], pp. 3–5.

18. Quoted in Marchal E. Landgren, *The Late Landscapes of William*

Morris Hunt, exh. cat. (College Park, MD: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1976), p. 29.

19. Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* [*Talks on Art*], pp. 66, 68.

20. Quoted in Knowlton, *Art-Life of William Morris Hunt,* p. 30.

21. William Morris Hunt, *Talks About Art* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1878), p. 84.

22. Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* [*Talks on Art*], p. 4.

23. Ibid., pp. 35–36.

24. Ibid., pp. 4–5.

25. Quoted in Landgren, *The Late Landscapes of William Morris Hunt,* p. 32.

26. Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* [*Talks on Art*], pp. 41–42.

27. Henry David Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals,* p. 172.

28. Hunt, *On Painting and Drawing* [*Talks on Art*], p. 65.

29. Quoted in Landgren, *The Late Landscapes of William Morris Hunt,* p. 41.

30. Ibid., p. 42. From an unidentified clipping in Hunt's scrapbook.

31. For a full discussion of Homer's debt to Hunt, see Henry Adams, "The Contradictions of William Morris Hunt," in *William Morris Hunt, A Memorial Exhibition, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,* exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1979), pp. 28–34.

32. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 1, 1880.

33. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "The Procession of the Flowers," *Atlantic Monthly,* December 1862, quoted in *The Magnificent Activist, The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (Da Capo Press, 2000), p. 482.

34. Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer 1865–1915* (E.P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 66.

35. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Random House, Modern Library Edition, 1996), p. 237.

36. Ibid., p. 97.

37. Ibid., p. 87.

38. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Marble Faun* (The Wildside Press, LLC; www.wildsidepress.com, 2005), p. 10.

39. Henry James, from his 1903 short story "The Madonna of the Future," in Henry James, *The Complete Stories,* 1864–1874 (Library of America edition, 1999), p. 773.

40. Van Wyck Brooks, *New England Summer,* pp. 148–155.

41. The catholic tastes of Boston were on display in the 1879 *Exhibition of Contemporary Art* at the Museum of Fine Arts, which included the Tonalists J. Appleton Brown, J. Foxcroft Cole (both good artists whose reputations never moved much beyond New England), Hunt, La Farge, Dewing, Ryder, Tiffany, Twachtman, and Whistler; Millet and the Barbizon artists; and the realists Homer, Chase, Duveneck, Eakins, and Chase. A group of Hudson River artists was also included.

42. "Boston is a Tonalist kind of town," was a remark made to the author by Colleen Fesko, head of American and European Paintings and Prints at the auction house Skinner (Boston). Fesko was reflecting on the many thousands of Tonalist works that have passed through Skinner in the past two decades, mostly form New England estates and collections.

43. La Farge, *The Higher Life,* p. 138.

44. Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905) p. 323.

45. Royal Cortissoz, *John La Farge: A Memoir and a Study* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1911), pp. 134–135.

46. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams,* pp. 370–371.

47. Ibid p. 370.

48. Quoted in Charles H. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting* (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937; originally published 1907), p. 145.

49. Quoted in Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood,* exh. cat. (Washington. DC: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 1975), p. 32.

50. Quoted in Cortissoz, *John La Farge,* p. 112.

51. Ibid., pp. 112–113.

52. Ibid., pp. 114–115.

53. The great Tonalist collector George A. Hearn was so enamored of *Edge of Forest,* that he reversed his gift of the painting to The Metropolitan Museum of Art after five years and returned it to his collection, where it remained until the end of his life.

54. Quoted in James L. Yarnall, *Nature and Art in the Painting of John La Farge,* exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1987), p. 82.

55. Quoted in Cortissoz, *John La Farge,* pp. 122–123.

56. This bewitching mood is suggested by Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer 1865–1915*: "Everything in Newport suggested leisure. The mouldering old mastyards, littered with spars and timber, broken rudders, rusty anchors, windlasses and kettles, the lofts, with their coils of rope and empty casks, the pigeonholes with faded labels bearing the names of forgotten ships, told the tale of a past that had ceased to compete with the present." p. 67.

57. Ibid., p. 75.

58. Quoted in Cortissoz, *John La Farge,* pp. 129–130.

59. Ibid., p. 130.

60. Ibid., p. 131.

61. Quoted in James L. Yarnall, *John La Farge in Paradise: The Painter and His Muse,* exh cat. (Newport, RI: William Vareika Fine Art, 1995), p. 113.

62. Ibid., p. 114.

63. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting,* pp. 151–152.

64. Cortissoz, *John La Farge,* p. 128.

65. Ernest Knaufft, "American Painting To-Day," in *The American Review of Reviews,* by Albert Shaw (1907), p. 690.

66. Quoted in Cortissoz, *John La Farge,* p. 122.

67. Yarnall, *John La Farge in Paradise,* p.116.

68. Ibid., p. 117.

69. Quoted in Cortissoz, *John La Farge,* p. 134.

70. Ibid.

71. Cortissoz, *John La Farge,* p. 134.

72. Knaufft, "American Painting To-Day," pp. 689–690.

CHAPTER TWO (pp. 35–79)

1. Quoted in Rachael Ziady DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 132–133.

2. Quoted in Henry Adams, *John La Farge* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), p. 73.

3. Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1905), p. 225.

4. Charles Caffin, *The Story of American Painting* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing, 2nd ed., 1937; originally published: New York: Frederick Stokes Co., 1907), p. 70.

5. Isham, *The History of American Painting,* p. 248.

6. Ibid., p. 252.

7. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting,* p. 71.

8. Ibid., pp. 71–72, 75, 77–78.

9. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape,* p. 15.

10. Quoted in Michael Quick and Nicolai Cikovsky, *George Inness* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985), p. 50.

11. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape,* p. 21.

12. John Wilmerding, "On Defining Luminism," in Barbara Novak,

American Light (Lawrenceville, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 25.

13. Ibid., p. 27.

14. Quoted in Michael Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p. 1.

15. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 201, from a *New York Evening Post* review, April 15, 1884: "Mr. Inness, classed in respect to his color powers, must be considered as a tonalist, and whenever he attempts to leave this quality and venture into the higher power of color he fails."

16. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in *Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essay & Lectures*, edited by Joel Porte (The Library of America, 1983) p. 34.

17. George Inness Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness* (New York: Kennedy Galleries, Inc., and Da Capo Press, 1969; originally published 1917 [Century Co.]), p. 117.

18. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 32.

19. George Inness Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, pp. 130–131.

20. Frank Jewett Mather Jr., *Estimates in Art* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931; repr. Books for Library Press, 1970), p. 42.

21. Period critic quoted in Nicolai Cikovsky, *George Inness* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), p. 24.

22. Review, *Knickerbocker Magazine* 42, July 1853, quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and The Science of Landscape*, p. 93.

23. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 11.

24. This and the preceding two quotations are all from George Inness Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, pp. 30–33.

25. Michael Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p. 150. "Counter to this interpretation, it should be said that if the informal subject and perhaps the light effect can be related to French practice, the painting's insistent naturalism—especially evident in the light raking across the foreground weeds to give them additional prominence and in the accurately observed cloud formations—has more to do with contemporary English and American practice." Quick is assuredly correct, but Inness was forging ahead in an arc that would reduce naturalist detail to the bare minimum, enough to provide interest and rest points for the eye, and even these details would in time be reduced to abstract or symbolic forms, a mere flick of the brush here and there.

26. Mather, *Estimates in Art*, p. 50.

27. Inness, George Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, pp. 131–132.

28. Inness, George Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, p. 34.

29. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 147.

30. Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné*, p. 165. Quick states of the Medfield period (p. 168): "This is the earliest point at which the influence of the Barbizon school is unmistakably present in Inness's work . . . his attentive study of the Barbizon-school paintings available to him in this country and especially in Boston was the decisive factor in the dramatic change in his style while he was in Medfield."

31. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 137, from an article in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, February 19, 1862. The article discussed the distinction been the more finished work of the Hudson River School and the broader style of French painting popular in Boston art circles.

32. Quoted in Quick and Cikovsky, *George Inness*, p. 23.

33. Ibid.

34. *Harper's Weekly* (1867), quoted in Cikovsky, *George Inness*, p. 40.

35. Inness, George Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, pp. 45–46.

36. Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné*, p. 180.

37. Ibid., pp. 176–177,

38. Inness, George Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, p. 67-68.

39. Isham, p. 257,

40. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 76.

41. Isham, *The History of American Painting*, p. 258.

42. Ibid., p. 258.

43. Quoted in Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné*, p. 340.

44. Quoted in Adrienne Baxter Bell, *George Inness and the Visionary Landscape* (New York: George Braziller, 2003), p. 80.

45. Debby Applegate, *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), p. 92.

46. Ibid., p. 470.

47. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 122.

48. Ibid., p. 123. As DeLue points out, much of Beecher's thinking along these lines was derived from Archibald Alison's theory of association, based on his popular *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790). Alison maintained that the viewer's aesthetic response to a vignette in nature, or an artist's rendering, was a result not so much of the inherent beauty or even the poetic skill of the artist, as of the observer's previous associations with similar scenes. These trains of association stored in memory and, in a sense, inventoried by the imagination produce a sense of vague recognition and residual joy, even if the previous moments cannot be precisely remembered. Such trains of thought and associated memories were precisely the imaginative moments of vague recognition and spontaneous joy that infused so much of Marcel Proust's writing.

49. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 29: Charles de Kay, "Art Notes," *Appletons' Journal* 9 (January 1873): 157.

50. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and The Science of Landscape*, p. 43: Charles de Kay [Henry Eckford, pseud.], "George Inness." *The Century Magazine* 24 (May 1882): 57–64.

51. Quoted Cikovsky, *George Inness*, p. 90.

52. Quoted in Bell, p. 80.

53. Quoted in DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape*, p. 135.

54. Inness, George Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, p. xxi (introduction by Elliott Daingerfield).

55. Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné*, p. 347.

56. Quoted in Quick and Cikovsky, *George Inness*, p. 205.

57. Peter Gay, *Modernism, The Lure of Heresy* (New York: Norton, 2008), p. 131. Inness and Kandinsky shared many sources of inspiration in various mystical systems and Theosophical dogmas, and ultimately the Romantic Movement. "The modern world, Kandinsky believed, much as German Romantics had done a century before, had lost its soul and desperately needed to be re-enchanted, and art alone could do that." p. 131.

58. Quoted in Quick and Cikovsky, *George Inness*, p. 209.

59. Royal Cortissoz, *Personalities in Art* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1968, repr. of 1925 ed., C. Scribner's Sons), p. 396.

60. Mather, *Estimates in Art*, pp. 149–150.

61. Ibid., p. 122.

62. Elizabeth Gilbert Martin, *Homer Martin, A Reminiscence* (New York: William Macbeth, 1904), p. 16.

63. Mather, *Estimates in Art*, p. 129. This may be a paraphrase of John Richard Dennett quoted by Elizabeth Martin in her reminiscence (see note 62): "Martin's landscapes look as if no one but God and himself had ever seen the places." p. ix.

64. Henry David Thoreau, "Ktaadn," in *The Selected Works of Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975; Cambridge ed.), p. 520.

65. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 8, 1879.

66. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 30, 1879.

67. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, May 4, 1882.

68. Mather, *Estimates in Art*, p. 131.

69. Quoted in Peter Bermingham, *American Art in the Barbizon Mood* (Washington, DC.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), p. 60.

70. Isham, *The History of American Painting*, p. 265.

71. Dana H. Caroll, *Fifty-Eight Paintings by Homer D. Martin* (Privately printed, 1913), p. 115, number 44, "Lake George."

72. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, May 4, 1882.

73. *The Selected Works of Thoreau*, Cambridge Edition, Nature Essays: *Walking*, p. 673.

74. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting*, pp. 210–213.

75. Henry David Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, edited by Odell Shepard (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), p. 149, December 11, 1855.

76. Joel Myerson, *Emerson and Thoreau: The Contemporary Reviews*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 425.

77. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting*, p. 207.

78. Quoted in Mather, *Estimates in Art*, p. 138.

79. Elizabeth Gilbert Martin, *Homer Martin, A Reminiscence*, p. 49.

80. Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, pp. 130–131, May 1854.

81. Quoted at http://cincinnatiartmuseum.org/pg/galleries/nature/pages/2002-3.51.43_CAM.html, 10/24/08.

82. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 26, 1880.

83. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 16, 1904.

84. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, February 25, 1881.

85. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 13, 1881. "Great depth of sentiment or vigor of execution cannot be allowed Mr. Wyant, nor as a composer is he free from a tendency to pettiness. His landscapes are apt to be broken up by too great variety in cloud effects, too many unnecessary trees and rocks."

86. Henry David Thoreau, "Nature Essays": *Walking*, in *The Selected Works of Thoreau* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975; Cambridge ed.), p. 672.

87. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting*, p. 200.

88. Ibid., p. 202.

89. Ibid., p. 226. Caffin went on to write: "Considered, however, purely as painting, they are less satisfactory. In undertaking the technical problem of rendering light and atmosphere he anticipated what we shall see became a motive of the next generation, but in comparison with modern pictures, his own lack elasticity and clarity of colour."

90. Lewis Mumford, *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts of America 1865–1895* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955; repr. of 1931 ed.), pp. 196–197.

91. Review (1877), quoted in Trevor J. Fairbrother, *The Bostonians, Painters of an Elegant Age, 1870–1930* (Museum of Fine Art, Boston, 1986), p. 37.

92. Mather, *Estimates in Art*, p. 111.

CHAPTER THREE (pp. 81–145)

1. Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., *Estimates in Art* (Freeport, New York: Books For Libraries Press, 1970), p. 315. Writing of Chase in terms of Tonalism, Mather notes: "Once asked how he got his somber richness of color and fullness of form, the great Courbet answered simply: 'I take pains with my tones—Je cherche mes tons.' By Chase's time the modest tones had become the 'Values,' with a very big V. He was their American Apostle. As a practical counsel this meant that appearances must be re-created in paint according to that optical law by which we grasp an object through interpretation of its salient, colored planes, the task being to read from these planes, the farness or nearness and the structure of the object . . . . Hals and Velásquez had carried this research far, and Manet had renewed it most brilliantly. Chase made of it an aesthetic and almost a religion, prudently seeing the values in the stable luminosity of the studio . . . . It was the main endeavor of the last years of the nineteenth century." (pp. 311–312.)

2. Quoted in Michael Quick, *An American Painter Abroad: Frank Duveneck's European Years*, exh. cat. (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Art Museum, 1987), p. 43. Quick points out that Duveneck was the consummate craftsman, always painting "wet-into-wet," while maintaining perfect control over his values. "When applying one wet stroke upon another, the one did not lie upon the other; instead the two mixed upon the canvas, becoming one blended stroke. . . . This is a feat of the greatest possible difficulty, requiring absolute clarity of observation and precision in judging exact color and value, in addition to masterly control of the brush." (p. 43.)

3. Quoted in Nelson White, *The Life and Art of J. Frank Currier* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1936), pp. 9–13.

4. Of the six circa 1878 Currier watercolors in the collection of the Boston Art Club—*Canal (Schleissheim)*, *Apple Tree (Polling)*, *Grove (Polling)*, *Beechwood Interior (Polling)*, *Roadside Scene (Polling?)*, and *Street Scene (Polling?)*—only *Apple Tree (Polling)* lacks firm documentation regarding its inclusion in the 1879 American Watercolor Society exhibition.

5. Quoted in Margaret C. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, exh. cat. in conjunction with the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 147.

6. Ibid.

7. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 7, 1878.

8. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, February 1, 1879.

9. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, February 5, 1879.

10. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, February 6, 1882.

11. This review and the preceding two quotes are all from Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, p. 179.

12. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, January 22, 1881.

13. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, February 6, 1881.

14. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, January 22, 1881.

15. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, p. 186, quoting the critic George Hows.

16. Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, p. 188.

17. Quoted in Conrads, *Winslow Homer and the Critics*, p. 194.

18. Quoted in Nickolai Cikovsky, *Winslow Homer*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC.: National Gallery of Art, 1995), p. 198.

19. Quoted in White, *The Life and Art of J. Frank Currier*, p. 59.

20. Quoted in Cikovsky, *Winslow Homer*, p. 164.

21. Ibid.

22. Quoted in White, *The Life and Art of J. Frank Currier*, pp. 25–26.

23. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, December 20, 1891.

24. Quoted in White, *The Life and Art of J. Frank Currier*, p. 63.

25. White, *The Life and Art of J. Frank Currier*, p. 68.

26. Sadakichi Hartmann, *A History of American Art* (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1934; originally published 1901), p. 205.

27. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 7, 1878.

28. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 28, 1878.

29. Quoted in Lisa Peters, *John Henry Twachtman, An American Impressionist*, exh. cat. (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 1999), p. 31.

30. Lisa Peters, *John Twachtman, "A Painter's Painter,"* exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2006), p. 37.

31. Ibid., p. 37.

32. Quoted in Peters, *John Henry Twachtman: An American Impressionist*, pp. 39–40.

33. Ibid., p. 48.

34. Quoted in Erica E. Hirshler, "The Paintings of Charles A. Platt," in Keith Morgan, *Shaping an American Landscape: The Art and Architecture of Charles A. Platt*, exh. cat. (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art and University Press of New England, 1995), p. 55.

35. Ibid., p. 47.

36. Ibid., pp. 47–48.

37. Ibid., p. 48.

38. Ibid., p. 49.

39. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Chapter III, Beauty, Essays and Lectures* (Library of America ed., 1983), pp. 18–19.

40. Joseph Pennell, *The Adventures of an Illustrator* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1925), p. 143.

41. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 9, 1882.

42. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* December 9, 1892.

43. Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 448–449.

44. *New York Times*, November 7, 1916.

45. Royal Cortissoz, *Personalities in Art* (Books for Libraries Press; originally published 1925), p. 118.

46. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 19, 1898.

47. Quoted in H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century Painters and Their French Teacher* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), p. 8.

48. Isham, *The History of American Painting*, pp. 367–368.

49. Quoted in David Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy, 1860–1910*, exh. cat. (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1982), pp. 9–10.

50. Quoted in Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy,* p. 43.

51. Quoted in Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy,* p. 29.

52. Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy,* p. 46.

53. Quoted in Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy,* pp. 46–47.

54. Ibid., p. 47.

55. Charles H. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting: The Evolution of Painting in America* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing Co., 1937, repr. of 1907 edition by Frederick A. Stokes Co.), pp. 266–267.

56. *New York Times,* October 14, 1930.

57. John C. Van Dyke, *Nature for Its Own Sake, First Studies in Natural Appearances* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921, originally published 1898), pp. 138–139. The success of *Nature for Its Own Sake*, like the publishing success of so many of Van Dyke's writings on art, is indicative of an expanding, curious, and art-literate American public in the 1880s onward. Van Dyke notes that he was hoping to teach his readers to see like an artist. "It was an attempt to point out the beauties of nature as seen by a landscape painter—beauties that all could see if they would—but I do not think that idea ever got through to the public." *The Autobiography of John C. Van Dyke: A Personal Narrative of American Life 1861–1931,* edited by Peter Wild (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), p. 76.

58. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 13, 1894.

59. In his immensely influential *Art for Art's Sake* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), John C. Van Dyke notes in his chapter on values: "As far as I am able to judge, therefore, I may say that the maintenance of values in closely related tones of color is a leading principle of color-harmony." He traces the heritage of the emphasis on values and tones from the Venetians to Velásquez and Rembrandt, then to the Barbizon painters, and the contemporary work of Bastien-Lepage, and the Americans Sargent, Chase, and Weir; Whistler was the master of the craft. "In common with other art-means, value has of late been emphasized too much, perhaps, and given undue prominence. Painting like poetry, oscillates between extremes. At one time it is color that exercises the ingenuity of the schools, at another time line, at another textures and brush-work, and now it is value that sets the art world agog, and makes bad blood between the so-called naturalist and the old-time conservative." (pp. 173–176.)

60. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Van Dyke, *Art for Art's Sake*, pp. 77–80. *Art for Art's Sake* went through many editions and was widely used as a textbook in art schools and read in reading circles. The artist Kenyon Cox reviewed it favorably and Whistler was so enthusiastic about the book and its author that he adopted Van Dyke into his inner circle of friends. Van Dyke was a Renaissance man: writer, scholar, teacher, naturalist, and all-round outdoorsman. Early in his career as an arts writer and advocate, he turned against narrative art stressing a purely pictorial appreciation that emphasized tone, form, and composition—that communicated emotion in the same way that the natural world offered up its many beauties to the observant. He believed in the enjoyment of beauty as the highest good, or more precisely, the impression of beauty found in nature, passed on by the artist and poet, and apprehended by those who cared enough to enjoy its splendor. Like Thoreau, Van Dyke was a romantic at heart, believing in the essential link between art, nature, and man as the ultimate interpreter of the world's glory.

61. Ibid., p. 90.

62. Arthur Hoeber, "A Summer in Brittany," *The Monthly Illustrator*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1895), pp. 74–80, quoted in Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy*, p. 41.

63. "The Forty Days," *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1896, p. 454.

64. Quoted in Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy*, p. 133.

65. White, *The Life and Art of J. Frank Currier*, p. 35.

66. Quoted in Morgan, *Shaping an American Landscape: The Art and Architecture of Charles A. Platt*, p. 65.

67. Ibid., p. 65.

68. Quoted in Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy*, p. 48.

69. Quoted in Nicolai Cikovsky, *James McNeill Whistler,* exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), p. 234.

70. John La Farge, *Considerations on Painting* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1908), pp. 134–135.

71. Quoted in Michael Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), note 40, p. 44.

72. Isham, *The History of American Painting*, p. 410.

73. This and the preceding two quotations are from Birge Harrison, *Landscape Painting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), pp. 137–139.

74. Ibid., pp. 31–32.

75. Ibid., pp. 38–39.

76. Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy*, p. 65,

77. Harrison, *Landscape Painting*, p. 43.

78. Ibid., p. 53.

79. Ibid., p. 54.

80. Quoted in Quick, *Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné*, p. 13. Quick notes: "These characteristics of the landscapes of the early 1880s reflect the same French influences that Inness had absorbed from the young artists in his approach to figural painting. Bastien-Lepage's desire to represent things exactly as they appeared in daylight led him to favor the soft, cool light of a lightly overcast sky, because the appearance of the forms would change little over the time that the artist was working, even from day to day." (p. 13.)

81. Quoted in Valerie Ann Leeds, *Charles Harold Davis in Retrospect: His Art and Career* (Santa Fe, NM: Gerald Peters Gallery, 2007), p. 5.

82. Edward Simmons, *From Seven to Seventy: Memories of a Painter and a Yankee* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1922), p. 146.

83. Quoted in Richard Dorment, *James Mcneill Whistler,* exh. cat. (London, Tate Gallery, 1995), p. 20.

84. E. R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (London: William Heinemann, 1925; originally published 1908), p. 220.

85. Ibid., p, 217.

86. John C. Van Dyke, *American Painting and Its Tradition* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), pp. 159–160.

87. Ibid.

88. Quoted in E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler* (William Heinemann, 1908), p. 223.

89. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* February 28, 1904.

90. Quoted in Jane Calhoun Weaver, ed., *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 319–320.

91. Robert Rosenblum, "Rothko and Tradition," in *On Modern American Art: Selected Essays* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), p. 118.

92. Quoted in Denys Sutton, *Nocturne: The Art of James McNeill Whistler* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1964), p. 136.

93. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting,* pp. 238–241.

94. Ibid., p. 302.

95. Quoted in Sutton, *Nocturne* pp. 50–51.

96. Dorment, *James McNeill Whistler,* pp. 24–25.

97. E. R. and J. Pennel, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler,* p. 115.

98. James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967, repr. of 1892 ed.), p. 127 ("The Red Rag").

99. Harold Speed, *Oil Painting Techniques and Material* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987, originally published 1924), pp. 75–76. In his chapter on tone and color design, Speed echoes Harrison's reflections on tone in his *Landscape Painting.* "A picture designed on a scheme of gradated tones is more graceful than one designed on flat tones; but may easily degenerate into effeminacy and feebleness." Speed recommends a mixture of gradated and flat tones, " . . . which have more force of character; the gradations being given by lost edges. The larger the number of these lost edges the more gracious the expression, and the larger the number of hard edges, the more forceful and less gracious the expression. In normal work there is a pretty balance between these two classes of edge set up; lost-and-foundness playing in varying degrees along all the edges. The smaller the range of tone used the quieter and more peaceful will be the effect. This smaller range of tone should always be chosen from the middle of your scale, or the balance of tone will be uncomfortable." (pp. 187–188.) Speed's advice—he was born in 1873—represents the received wisdom of a generation that came of age when Tonalism, and Whistler, were in their ascendancy.

100. Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies,* p. 127.

101. E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler,* p. 117.

102. Ibid., p. 113.

103. Quoted in Dorment, *James McNeill Whistler,* p. 123.

104. E.R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler,* p. 113.

105. Ibid., p. 114.

106. Mark Rothko quoted in James E. B. Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 230.

107. Rosenblum, "Rothko and Tradition" p. 118.

108. E. R. and J. Pennell, *The Life of James McNeill Whistler,* pp. 115–116.

109. Quoted in Dorment, *James McNeill Whistler,* p. 122.

110. Quoted in Dorment, *James McNeill Whistler,* p. 121.

111. Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies,* p. 144.

112. Quoted in Linda Merrill, *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting,* exh. cat. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 2003), p. 36.

113. Ibid., p. 36.

114. Ibid.

115. Joseph Pennell, *The Adventures of an Illustrator* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1925), p. 175.

116. For a full description of his device, see Dorment, *James McNeill Whistler,* p. 174.

117. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* February 28, 1904.

118. Van Dyke, *American Painting and Its Tradition,* p. 182.

119. Sadakichi Hartmann, *The Whistler Book* (Boston: Page and Company, 1910), pp. 89–95, 168–169.

120. Quoted in Merrill, *After Whistler,* p. 45.

CHAPTER FOUR (pp. 147–223)

1. Quoted in Kathleen A. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 70.

2. Quoted in Pyne, p. 68, remarks by John La Farge on the opening of the American Academy in Rome, 1905.

3. Eliot Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design, 1825–1953* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 124.

4. Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927; originally published 1905), pp. 361–362.

5. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 6, 1877.

6. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 21, 1877.

7. Quoted in Raymond J. Steiner, *The Art Students League of New York: A History* (Saugerties, NY: CSS Publications, 1999), p. 41.

8. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 28, 1879. In this and all art matters, de Kay had many inside sources among artists in the Gilder circle.

9. Letters from Charles Warren Eaton written to Leonard Ochtman between 1880 and 1882, in the collection of the Bruce Museum, Greenwich, CT. See David Cleveland, *Intimate Landscapes: Charles Warren Eaton and the Tonalist Movement in American Art, 1880–1920* (Groton, MA: De Menil Gallery at Groton School, 2004), pp. 17–22.

10. Quoted in Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design,* p. 97.

11. Quoted in Gilder letters, *Letters of Richard Watson Gilder,* ed. by his daughter Rosamund Gilder (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press: 1916) citing Mr. Low in his "Chronicle of Friendships," p. 82.

12. Ibid., p. 66.

13. Boston newspaper, quoted in Jennifer A. Bienenstock, *The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists, 1877–1884* (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1983; facsimile, Ann Arbor, MI.: University Microfilms International, 1983), p. 22.

14. Quoted in David B. Dearinger, ed., *Rave Reviews: American Art and Its Critics, 1826–1925* (New York: National Academy of Design; distributed by University Press of New England, 2000), p. 99.

15. Quoted in Bienenstock, *The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists,* p. 28.

16. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 6, 1877.

17. Ibid.

18. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 21, 1877.

19. Quoted in Bienenstock, *The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists,* p. 20.

20. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* June 17, 1877.

21. Ibid.

22. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* October 30, 1877.

23. Bienenstock, *The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists,* pp. 39–40.

24. Quoted in Lois Marie Fink and Joshua C. Taylor, *Academy: The*

Academic Tradition in American Art (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), p. 79.

25. Adrienne Baxter Bell, ed., *George Inness: Writing and Reflections on Art and Philosophy* (New York: George Braziller, 2006), p. 60.

26. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 7, 1878.

27. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 1, 1878.

28. Quoted in Lisa Peters, John Henry *Twachtman: An American Impressionist* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art; distributed by Hudson Hills Press, 1999), p. 31.

29. Quoted in Bienenstock, *The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists,* p. 54.

30. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 10, 1879.

31. This and the preceding three quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 8, 1879.

32. Quoted in Elizabeth Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder* (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art; Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), p. 292.

33. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 10, 1879.

34. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 26, 1880.

35. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 16, 1880.

36. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 26, 1880.

37. Ibid.

38. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* February 2, 1881.

39. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 6, 1882.

40. Quoted in Bienenstock, *The Formation and Early Years of the Society of American Artists,* p. 118.

41. Ibid., p. 140.

42. *New York Times,* review, May 4, 1882. Because of lack of space, the society had to hold a second exhibition in 1882 to accommodate the works that could not be included in the first. This is de Kay's review of the second exhibition.

43. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 4, 1882.

44. Quoted in Michael Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), vol. 2, p. 15. "The critic [*New-York Daily Tribune*] regretted that, instead of painting from nature, landscape artists painted in their studios, 'working up sketches according to studio schemes of color.'" p. 45, note 51.

45. Quoted in Dearinger, *Rave Reviews,* p. 108.

46. Ibid., p. 108.

47. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 25, 1884.

48. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 23, 1890.

49. This and the preceding five quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 7, 1879.

50. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* November 23, 1884.

51. Ibid.

52. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 21, 1890.

53. *New York Times,* review, March 23, 1895.

54. *New York Times,* review, March 17, 1897.

55. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Birge Harrison, *Landscape Painting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), pp. 38–40, 232–233.

56. Rachael Ziady DeLue, *George Inness and the Science of Landscape* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 204.

57. Quoted in Bell, *George Inness: Writings and Reflections on Art and Philosophy,* p. 79.

58. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* June 2, 1879.

59. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* December 3, 1892.

60. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 29, 1892.

61. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* January 17, 1917. In 1917, Robert Handley, a stockbroker, paid $45,000 for Inness's *Autumn Woodlands.*

62. Isham, *The History of American Painting,* pp. 373–374.

63. This and the preceding three quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 30, 1879.

64. Charles de Kay, *New York Times,* March 26, 1880.

65. [probably Charles de Kay], review, *New York Times,* March 29, 1902.

66. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 10, 1879.

67. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 19, 1882.

68. [probably Charles de Kay], review, *New York Times,* February 2, 1905.

69. Isham, *The History of American Painting,* pp. 374–375.

70. Ibid.

71. Will Low, *A Painter's Progress* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1910), pp. 213–215.

72. Bell, *George Inness: Writings and Reflections on Art and Philosophy,* p. 91.

73. Ibid., p. 66.

74. Ibid., p. 91.

75. Ibid., p. 69–70.

76. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* 1892.

77. Bell, *George Inness: Writings and Reflections on Art and Philosophy,* p. 71.

78. Quoted in Dearinger, *Rave Reviews,* p. 119.

79. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life,* p. 53.

80. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* August 21, 1898.

81. Richard Dorment, *James McNeill Whistler,* exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994) p. 34.

82. Linda Merrill, *After Whistler: The Artist and His Influence on American Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, in association with the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 2003), p. 17.

83. Ibid., p. 19.

84. Low, *A Painter's Progress,* p. 285. When Will Low returned to Paris in 1900, he found that Whistler had become the rage in Parisian ateliers. American artists like Robert Henri, William Redfield, Chauncey Ryder, and Leon Dabo who studied in Paris at this time had all come under the influence of Whistler and his low-toned style.

85. William F. Losee, "Whistler's Legacy," *Brush and Pencil,* vol. 12, no. 5 (August 1903), pp. 325, 333. The contemporary significance of Whistler's death was remarkable; *Brush and Pencil* devoted an entire issue (more than fifty pages in length) to the artist, covering his etchings, paintings, and anecdotes from his life.

86. Nicolai Cikovsky, *George Inness* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1993), pp. 91–92.

87. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 13, 1881.

88. Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné,* vol. 2, p. 14.

89. Quoted in Bell, ed., *George Inness: Writings and Reflections on Art and Philosophy,* p. 75.

90. Quoted in Bell, ed., *George Inness: Writings and Reflections on Art and Philosophy,* p. 76.

91. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 10, 1878.

92. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 8, 1879.

93. Charles de Kay [as Eckford], quoted in Cikovsky, *George Inness,* p. 107.

94. George Inness Jr., *Life and Letters of George Inness* (New York:

Kennedy Galleries and Da Capo Press, 1969; originally published 1917), pp. 123–124, 130–131.

95. Ibid., pp. 228–232.

96. Ibid., pp. 252–253.

97. Charles H. Caffin, *The Story of American Painting: The Evolution of Painting in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Publishing, 1937; originally published by Frederick Stokes Co., 1907), p. 143.

98. Kenneth Clark, *Looking at Pictures* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 36.

99. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 25, 1884.

100. In 1959 the art historian Lloyd Goodrich wrote of Ryder: "Ryder's art was a product of an intense inner life, little influenced by the world around him or the art of others. In it the dead wood of the older romantic school was eliminated…Ryder pictured the inner reality of the mind, and out of this deep unconscious world brought forth the purest poetic imagery in our art of the century. In form and design he was the most original plastic artist of his time. The romantic imagination which had been starved or misdirected in so many of his predecessors found full expression, in stronger form but with greater intensity, in the work of our first pure imaginative creator." Lloyd Goodrich, *Albert P. Ryder* (New York: George Braziller, 1959), pp. 11–12. In fact, Ryder was a full participant in New York art circles and profoundly influenced by other artists and the zeitgeist of the era.

101. Quoted in Goodrich, *Albert P. Ryder,* p. 15.

102. Quoted in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, pp. 20–21.

103. Frank Jewett Mather Jr., *Estimates in Art,* Series II (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1931; repr. Books for Library Press, 1970), p. 158.

104. Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, p. 216.

105. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* September 1, 1879.

106. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 8, 1879.

107. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* August 21, 1898.

108. Ibid.

109. Charles de Kay quoted in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* p. 40.

110. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 31, 1883.

111. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* August 21, 1898.

112. Ryder quoted in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* p. 59.

113. Quoted in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* p. 68.

114. Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* p. 99.

115. Albert Pinkham Ryder, letter to J. Alden Weir, quoted in Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* p. 307.

116. Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design*, p. 23.

117. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 2, 1879.

118. Glyn Vincent, *The Unknown Night: The Genius and Madness of R.A.Blakelock, An American Painter* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), p. 143.

119. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 16, 1880.

120. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 31, 1883.

121. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 25, 1884.

122. Cook quoted in Vincent, *The Unknown Night,* p. 159.

123. *New York Times,* review, April 2, 1916.

124. Abraham A. Davidson, *Ralph Albert Blakelock* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), p. 106.

125. Quoted in Vincent, *The Unknown Night*, p. 181.

126. Quoted in Vincent, *The Unknown Night*, pp. 179–180.

127. Davidson, *Ralph Albert Blakelock*, pp. 113–114.

128. Cora Blakelock, quoted in Davidson, *Ralph Albert Blakelock,* p. 114.

129. Henry David Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, edited by Odell Shepard (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), pp. 166–167.

130. *New York Times,* March 28, 1896.

131. *Brush and Pencil*, February 1902, pp. 264, 269.

132. Ibid.

133. John Canaday, review, *New York Times,* March 17, 1973.

134. This and the preceding five quotations are all from Murphy's diary, letters, and clippings come from the unpublished biography of J. Francis Murphy by Dr. Emerson Crosby Kelly, an Albany, New York, physician. The typescript biography, assembled from original documents is found in the Archives of American Art, reel no. 4341.

135. Joseph Pennell, *The Adventures of an Illustrator* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1925), p. 62.

136. Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design*, p. 10.

137. Eliot Clark divided Murphy's style into three periods: early (first), 1878–1885; middle (second), 1885–1900; and late (third), 1900–1921. He made it clear that the dates were simply rules of thumb and that the artist's various styles merge and evolve over time, eliding one into the next. Clark may not have been aware of Murphy's early Hudson River style of detailed panoramic landscapes before 1875, when he moved to New York, which, if included, would make four periods. From a present-day perspective, with more of Murphy's works available, the transition between Clark's first and second periods might better be located around 1890 when his forms become more generalized and expressive, and details are translated into paint-notes.

138. Quoted in Francis Murphy, *J. Francis Murphy, The Landscape Within, 1853–1921* (Yonkers, NY: Hudson River Museum, 1982), p. 10.

139. Eliot Clark, J. Francis Murphy, The American Artists Series (New York: Privately printed by Frederick Fairchild Sherman, 1926), p. 29.

140. Quoted in Kenneth Clark, *Moments of Vision* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1981), p. 113.

141. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, chap. 3, "Beauty," in *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), pp. 15-16.

142. Gilder described his loss to his friend John Burroughs: "Certainly I did not know that the breaking off of so young a life could bring, as it were, a death to the living; or, what is the same thing, a birth into an utterly different state of existence." Gilder letters, p. 76. Gilder had lost his father during the Civil War to disease.

143. From the unpublished biography of Murphy by Dr. Emerson Crosby Kelly.

144. Eliot Clark, *J. Francis Murphy,* The American Artists Series (New York: privately printed by Frederic Fairchild Sherman, 1926), p. 28.

145. Ibid., pp. 29–30.

146. Ibid., p. 33.

147. From the unpublished biography of Murphy by Dr. Emerson Crosby Kelly.

148. Ibid.

149. This and the preceding four quotations are all from Dr. Emerson Crosby Kelly's unpublished biography of Murphy.

150. Ibid., pp. 35–36.

151. "I went down to Hartman and got a new color… It is the finest thing I have struck yet. It is emerald oxide of chromium, a dark green… It is the color I have been looking for for years. . . ." Letter from J. Francis Murphy to his wife, quoted in Clark, J. Francis Murphy, p. 47.

152. Ibid., p. 48.

153. Ibid., pp. 59–60.

154. Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE (pp. 225–299)

1. Quoted in *New York Times*, review, January 31, 1900.

2. Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art* (New York: Harper & Row, new ed., 1976; first published 1949), pp. 59–60.

3. The vast majority of the William T. Evans, George A. Hearn, and Charles Lang Freer collections of Tonalism, given respectively to the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art, remain off view to visitors.

4. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 17, 1884.

5. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 17, 1814.

6. Quoted in Dianne H. Pilgrim, "The Revival of Pastels in Nineteenth-Century America: The Society of Painters in Pastel," *The American Art Journal*, November 1978, p. 44.

7. Quoted in Pilgrim, "The Revival of Pastels in Nineteenth-Century America," p. 49.

8. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 5, 1888.

9. Charles de Kay and anonymous critic, quoted in Linda Merrill, *After Whistler: The Artist and his Influence on American Painting* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, in association with the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, 2003), p. 42.

10. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 5, 1888.

11. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 23, 1889.

12. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 5, 1888.

13. Quoted in Doreen Bolger, *American Pastels in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), p. 112.

14. Quoted in Barbara Weinberg, *Childe Hassam: American Impressionist*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 8n, p. 87.

15. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, January 29, 1887.

16. Minutes of the New York Water Color Club, p. 14. Archives of American Art, microfilm file N68-10.

17. Printed guidelines for submissions to the first annual exhibition included in minutes of New York Water Color Club. (See Archives of American Art, microfilm file N68-10.)

18. Charles de Kay, *New York Times,* June 22, 1890.

19. *Art Amateur*, review, vol. 24, no. 1 (December 1890), p. 3.

20. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* November 7, 1890.

21. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* January 29, 1891.

22. Charles de Kay, review,*New York Times,* November 18, 1893.

23. *New York Times,* review, February 15, 1896.

24. *New York Times,* review, November 7, 1896.

25. *New York Times,* review, November 8, 1901.

26. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* November 22, 1903.

27. *Brush and Pencil*, review, April–September 1902, p. 140. Later in the review the writer noted: "The low-keyed tones which have been in vogue for some seasons with the New York Water Color Club, and which are now appearing in the work of the older organization…."

28. Snell interview, *New York Times,* November 13, 1904.

29. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* November 10, 1905.

30. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 30, 1905.

31. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* October 30, 1908.

32. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 1879.

33. De Kay wrote of an Alexander Wyant watercolor in an 1880 review of the American Watercolor Society: "It is no better and no worse than before; the artist seems to be at a standstill and content with the goodly portion of admiration which his work always obtains." In the same review, de Kay wrote of J. Francis Murphy: "Perhaps it is not fair to ask what might have happened if these charming pictures had been a little bit softer and sketchier…." For all intents both Wyant and Murphy followed in the direction de Kay had suggested. *New York Times*, review, February 1, 1880.

34. Charles de Kay, *New York Times,* review, February 1, 1880.

35. Quoted in James Yarnall, *Recreation and Idleness: The Pacific Travels of John La Farge*, exh. cat. (New York: Vance Jordan Fine Arts, 1998), p. 149.

36. De Kay singles out Hopkinson Smith for mass-producing many watercolors with commercial appeal but little individuality. "He does not give himself time to reflect on his work, and so try to put something into it beyond the mere picture on the retina of ordinary men. His method of painting, and especially the kind of finish he gives his picture, make one think of articles prepared for many people instead of a thing precious in itself, and rather directed to one especial lover of just that particular form of the beautiful." *New York Times*, review, February 9, 1879.

37. *New York Times,* review, February 9, 1879.

38. Homer Dodge Martin and Elizabeth G. Martin, Letters to William Crary Brownell, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

39. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, November 7, 1896.

40 Shepard (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), journal entry, September 7, 1851, p. 58.

41. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* February 3, 1894.

42. *New York Times*, review, February 1 and 15, 1896.

43. *New York Times,* review, January 20, 1897.

44. [Probably Charles de Kay], review, *New York Times*, November 10, 1905. It is possible that *Venetian Shipping* is Snell's prizewinning "On the Lagoon," featured at the 1905 New York Water Color Club exhibition, or a work close in subject and style. "Mr. Snell has the place of honor with his prize picture, 'On the Lagoon,' a view of Venetian boats in hazy weather when the scirocco blows faintly from the south and the air is full of an impalpable vapor collected by the wind as it passes up the Adriatic. The method used is what might be called 'dry water color,' in which the pigments are not so much floated on as brushed on, and then manipulated in various ways, somewhat as a painter in oils charges and rubs the canvas. Delicate atmospheric effects are secured in this way."

45. *New York Times,* review, April 18, 1896.

46. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, December 12, 1909.

47. Quoted in David Sellin, *Americans in Brittany and Normandy 1860–1910,* exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1982), p. 58.

48. Ibid., p. 59.

49. Ibid., p. 60.

50. [probably Charles de Kay], review, *New York Times*, March 22, 1910.

51. Quoted in *Biographical Sketches of American Artists* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State Library, 1913), p. 87.

52. *New York Times,* review, March 31, 1929.

53. John Canaday, *New York Times,* review, September 23, 1962.

54. Quoted in foreword to *Clifford Addams, Etchings and Drypoints,* exh. cat. (London: N.W. Lott & H.J. Gerrish Ltd, 1984), by the artist's granddaughter, Dawn Addams.

55. Letter from Donald Shaw MacLaughlan to his dealer Arthur H. Hahlo, November 10, 1911. Copy in Boston Museum of Fine Arts Library, artist's file.

56. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* May 25, 1884.

57. Quoted in Barbara Dayer Gallati, *William Merritt Chase: Modern American Landscapes, 1886–1890* (Brooklyn, NY: Brooklyn Museum of Art, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 2000), p. 44.

58. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 1, 1891.

59. Ibid.

60. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 7, 1878.

61. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 9, 1882.

62. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* 1892.

63. Quoted in Doreen Bolger Burke, *J. Alden Weir: An American Impressionist,* an American Art Journal Book (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1983), p. 193.

64. Clark, *Landscape into Art,* p. 32.

65. Ibid., p. 6.

66. Ibid., p. 179.

67. Quoted in Erika D. Passantino, ed., *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making* (Washington, DC: Phillips Collection; in association with Yale University Press, 1999), p. 152.

68. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 19, 1882.

69. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* April 24, 1887.

70. Quoted in Susan A. Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing: Beauty Reconfigured,* exh. cat. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), p. 108.

71. Quoted in Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing,* p. 59.

72. Quoted in Kathleen A. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 202.

73. Shepard, ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals,* journal entry, July 5, 1852, p. 92.

74. Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing,* p. 128.

75. For a full discussion of Dewing's role in the scandals surrounding Stanford White see Suzannah Lessard, *The Architect of Desire: Beauty and Danger in the Stanford White Family* (New York: The Dial Press, 1996).

76. Quoted in Hobbs, *The Art of Thomas Wilmer Dewing,* p. 37.

77. Quoted in Henry C. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p. 82.

78. Ibid., p. 172.

79. Ibid., p. 59.

80. Ibid., p. 39.

81. Henry C. White, in *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon,* wrote of de la Chevreuse methodology: "Although he gave due importance to clearness and beauty of line, Jacquesson emphasized the losing of edges, the merging of contours and forms one into another, and laid stress upon modeling by masses and values. The final result was an atmospheric envelopment of form and analysis of light and shadow carried much farther than in most schools." p. 42.

82. Quoted in Merrill, *After Whistler,* p 42.

83. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon,* p. 63.

84. Ibid., p. 173.

85. Ibid., p. 76.

86. Quoted in Merrill, *After Whistler,* p. 65.

87. Ibid., p. 66.

88. Shepard, ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals,* journal entry, January 30, 1852, p. 76.

89. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon,* p. 63.

90. Quoted in Merrill, *After Whistler,* p. 48.

91. Quoted in White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon,* p. 173.

92. Quoted in Merrill, *After Whistler,* p. 49.

93. Ibid., p. 42.

94. Ibid., p. 74.

95. Ibid., p. 75.

96. Ibid., p. 76.

97. Ibid., p. 76.

98. Quoted in White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon,* p. 101.

99. Quoted in Merrill, *After Whistler,* p. 130.

100. Ibid., p. 131.

101. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon,* p. 129.

102. Ibid., p. 149.

103. Ibid., p. 153.

104. Ibid. p. 172.

105. Ibid. p. 165.

106. For a full discussion of Charles Warren Eaton, see David Cleveland, *Intimate Landscape: Charles Warren Eaton and the Tonalist Movement in American Art, 1880–1920* (Groton, MA: De Menil Gallery at Groton School, 2004).

107. The letters of Charles Warren Eaton written to fellow artist Leonard Ochtman between 1880 and 1889 are now in the collection of the Bruce Museum, Greenwich, CT. Gift of Eleanor DelMar Revill.

108. This and the preceding eight quotations are from the letters of Charles Warren Eaton to Leonard Ochtman, 1880–90.

109. Ibid.

110. Clark, *Landscape into Art,* p. 13.

111. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon,* p. 59.

112. Frederick W. Morton, *Brush and Pencil,* vol. 4 (November 1901), p. 71.

113. Ibid.

114. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 29, 1902.

115. *New York Times,* review, April 3, 1904.

116. *A Gray Morning,* which won the Inness Gold Medal in 1903, was viewed by the author at a Florida auction; the painting had been cut down at the top and bottom and suffered extensive damage.

117. Frederick W. Morton, review, *Brush and Pencil,* vol. 9 (November 1901), p. 65.

118. *New York Times,* review, April 4, 1896.

119. *New York Times,* review, March 27, 1897.

120. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 25, 1899.

121. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* March 31, 1901.

122. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times,* December 8, 1900.

123. [probably Charles de Kay], review, *New York Times,* March 16, 1908.

124. Charles de Kay, *New York Times,* 1912, review of a Lotos Club exhibition of paintings from the Evans collection. "For many years to come we shall turn to their art for that repose which has 'fled from the banks of the river of time,' and for stimulus deriving from the union between adequate matter and adequate form."

125. Henry David Thoreau, *The Illustrated A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 8.

126. Shepard, ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals,* journal entry Dec. 11, 1855, p. 148.

127. Quoted in Ralph Sessions, et al., *The Poetic Vision: American Tonalism,* exh cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), p. 134.

128. When the remnants of Ben Foster's studio were sold by Grand Central Galleries after his death, several hundred paintings sold for a total of $35,000. *New York Times,* February 7, 1931.

CHAPTER SIX (pp. 301–351)

1. *Art Amateur* reviewer (anon.), quoted in Annette Blaugrund, *Paris 1889, American Artists at the Universal Exposition,* exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1989) p. 20.

2. Ibid. p. 58.

3. In 1888 the annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists contained 137 works, including 72 landscapes; in 1889, 169 works, with 90 landscapes; and in 1890, 206 works, of which 95 were landscapes. The

average proportion in the late 1880s of landscape to figurative and genre work remained around 50 percent.

4. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, July 27, 1889.

5. Ibid.

6. Carolyn Kinder Carr, *Revisiting the White City, American Art at the 1893 World's Fair*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, 1993), p. 74.

7. From a letter by Ives writing on the suitability of Kurtz to oversee the juries, quoted in Carr, *Revisiting the White City*, p. 83.

8. Chase quoted in Carr, *Revisiting the White City*, p. 87.

9. Carr, *Revisiting the White City*, p. 99.

10. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 30, 1893.

11. E.C.S. [probably Charles de Kay], "Impressions of an Art Student," *New York Times*, June 23, 1893.

12. Ibid.

13. Quoted in Carr, *Revisiting the White City*, p. 99.

14. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, July 9, 1893. De Kay portrays the French presence as dominant and unique in art, architecture, and sculpture. Nevertheless, he seems genuinely astonished at the relative power of the Americans. "It is a common saying here that the exhibit of French pictures is disappointing, and this is heard oftenest from those who are familiar with the display made at Paris in 1889 and with the Salons of recent years. The most obvious cause for this disappointment is discovered upon perambulating the other galleries, especially those of the United States, which have quite their share of the pictures that have been the ornaments or the 'astonishers' of Parisian exhibitions, and the disappointment is thus in itself a tribute to the supremacy of Paris as the centre of modern pictorial art, and especially of modern art education."

15. Quoted in Carr, *Revisiting the White City*, citing an unnamed critic in the *New York Daily Tribune*, p. 100.

16. *Art Amateur* critic (anon.) quoted in Linda Merrill, "The Soul of Refinement: Whistler and American Tonalism," in Ralph Sessions et al., *The Poetic Vision: American Tonalism*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), p. 66.

17. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, August 27, 1893.

18. This and the preceding two quotations are all from John Van Dyke, "Painting at the Fair," *The Century Magazine*, vol. 48, New Series, vol. 26, July 1894: 444–445.

19. This and the preceding five quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, August 24, 1894.

20. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, December 29, 1894.

21. Quoted in Jack Becker, *Henry Ward Ranger and the Humanized Landscape*, exh. cat. (Old Lyme, CT: Florence Griswold Museum, 1999), p. 31.

22. *New York Times*, review, March 28, 1896.

23. *New York Times*, review, March 27, 1897.

24. Ibid.

25. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 3, 1903.

26. This and the previous nine quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, Aug. 21, 1898.

27. Charles Harold Davis, writing to William Macbeth, quoted in Becker, *Henry Ward Ranger and the Humanized Landscape*, p. 36.

28. *The Century Magazine*, vol. 75, New Series, vol. 53, November 1907–April 1908: 317.

29. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 30, 1898.

30. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 2, 1902.

31. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 19, 1904.

32. Frederick W. Coburn, "Art Movements of Today [4]: The So-Called Passing of Impressionism," *The National Magazine* (Boston), vol. 18 (March–September 1903), pp. 259–264.

32. Charles Caffin, *The Art of Dwight Tryon: An Appreciation* (Privately printed, 1909), p. 5.

34. For a full listing of reviews, see William Gerdts, "The Society of American Landscape Painters," in Ralph Sessions et al., *The Poetic Vision: American Tonalism*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), p. 39.

35. J. Francis Murphy biography by Emerson Crosby Kelly, Archives of American Art, microfilm reel 4341.

36. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, May 3, 1900.

37. This and the preceding three quotations are all from Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, May 5, 1900.

38. *New York Times*, review, June 23, 1893. The review was signed E.S.C.

39. Charles de Kay, Lotos Club exhibition review, *New York Times*, March 25, 1899: "Very tender and filled with true sentiment is Dewey's 'Return of the Hay Boats,' loaned by Mr. Evans, with its diaphanous, sun-suffused mist . . . ."

40. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, December 24, 1905.

41. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, January 30, 1914.

42. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 9, 1898.

43. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 17, 1901.

44. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, February 12, 1907.

45. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, November 29, 1908.

46. Ibid.

47. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times* review, August 1, 1909

48. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 28, 1912.

49. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 16, 1916.

50. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 28, 1912; April 16, 1916; April 29, 1924.

51. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 16, 1916.

52. Ibid.

53. "Frederick W. Kost, Staten Island Artist," by Jean Leason, catalogue essay for a Brooklyn Museum retrospective on Kost, 1948.

54. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, May 5, 1900.

55. According to a Brooklyn Museum retrospective and catalogue by Jean Leason, 1948, Kost was born in New York City, May 15, 1861, moved to Staten Island with his family aged six, where he remained until 1900 when he moved to Long Island, subsequently buying a home in Brookhaven in 1906 and living there until his death in 1923.

56. Review in *The Curio* (New York), 1888.

57. Sales catalogue of the Collection of William T. Evans, January 31 and February 1 and 2, 1900; entries written by William Coffin.

58. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 1, 1903.

59. Quoted in David Dearinger, *Painting and Sculpture in the Collection of the National Academy of Design* (Manchester, VT: Hudson Hills Press, 2004), p. 335.

60. *New York Times* review, August 7, 1901. "[Charles Harry Eaton] returned there [Leonia, NJ] on Thursday, and was to have attended a meeting of the Leonia Council, of which he was a member, on that evening. He was stricken with paralysis as he left the train and was carried to a drug store, here he became unconscious. He was then removed to the Englewood Hospital. Mr. Eaton leaves a wife and daughter."

61 at the American Art Galleries with William Merritt Chase, Charles Melville Dewey, Robert C. Minor, and Frederic Remington, among others, which offers some guide to his reputation at the time.

62. *New York Times*, review, March 3, 1900.

63. Preface to the catalogue for the American Section of the Paris Exposition Universelle, 1900, pp. xv–xvi.

64. Quoted in Diane Pietrucha Fischer, "The Spirit of Inness: Creating

an 'American School' at the Paris Exposition of 1900" (1995), citing John B. Cauldwell's "Report of the Department of Fine Arts" (1900), *Resource Library*, September 15, 2004.

65. Quoted in Diane Pietrucha Fischer, ed., *Paris 1900, The "American School" at the Universal Exposition,* exh. cat. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 68.

66. Review, *Brush and Pencil*, vol. 7, no. 1 (October 1900), p. 45.

67. Ellis T. Clarke, review, *Brush and Pencil*, vol. 7, no. 1 (October 1900), p. 36.

68. This and the preceding two quotations are all from James B. Townsend, review, *New York Times,* July 14, 1900.

69. Charles Melville Dewey, quoted in a reviewin the *New York Times,* October 18, 1900.

70. Rowland Strong, review, *New York Times,* June 16, 1900.

71. *New York Times*, review, September 9, 1900.

71. *New York Times*, review, June 2, 1900.

73. Fischer, ed., *Paris 1900*, p. 74.

74. *New York Times*, review, June 2, 1900.

75. Francis Hopkinson Smith quoted in Fischer, ed., *Paris 1900*, p. 84.

76. Frederick Morgan Padelford, "The National Growth in Culture," *Journal of the National Institute of Social Sciences,* vol 2 (July 1916), pp. 170–171.

77. Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927; originally published 1905), pp. 439 and 449.

78. Art historian and curator Robert Rosenblum attempted to re-create the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle in the exhibition *1900: Art at the Crossroads,* which was held in 2000 at the Royal Academy of Arts, London; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. The exhibition portrayed a dazzling extravaganza of art comprising works included in the 1900 exposition and others created within a period of approximately ten years on either side of the century divide. Rosenblum's intention was to explore art and artists that included those who had been confined largely to the limbo of historic nonentities and also-rans. Out of this mixed bag, Rosenblum, like contemporary observers in 1900, aimed to tease out the innovative and progressive forces in the making—a retrospective eye searching backward for the incipient seeds of modernism. The result was an eye-popping array of brilliance and mediocrity. Rosenblum's re-creation confirmed contemporary accounts that Parisian academic genres and Naturalist-Impressionist styles dominated the various international schools.

79. Robert Rosenblum, *1900: Art at the Crossroads,* exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), p. 47.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid., p. 45.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., p. 250.

84. Robert Rosenblum, *On Modern American Art, Selected Essays* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), p. 118. In his essay "Rothko and Tradition," Rosenblum describes the continuity of the Tonalist heritage through Whistler to Monet and Rothko. Describing Monet's late water-landscapes, Rosenblum writes (p. 120): "In Monet, as in Rothko, this total immersion in the evanescent phenomena of colored light and atmosphere can lead through the looking glass of perception into a more subjective world of dream and meditation; and these reveries could even be physically extended to create a complete visual environment that might become an engulfing shrine, a sanctuary from the outside world." The major collectors of Tonalism around the turn of the century, like William T. Evans and Charles Freer, surrounded themselves in their homes and private galleries with tonal landscapes, seeking a retreat into the meditative peace invoked by the pictures on their walls.

85. This and the preceding five quotations are all from *The Nation*, New York Evening Post Company, no. 81, July 1, 1900–Dec. 31, 1900: 88–90. The review is signed NN. Since the reviewer notes a relative lack of familiarity with the homegrown American artists, he was likely based in Paris. If this was the case, the reviewer's reaction to the indigenous American Tonalists as forming a distinctive movement and style of expression is all the more significant.

86. Quoted in Fischer, ed., *Paris 1900*, p. 96.

CHAPTER SEVEN (pp. 353–437)

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1836), in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, edited by Joel Porte (New York: Library of America/ Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), p. 41.

2. Henry David Thoreau, *Natural History of Massachusetts*, in *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, edited by Bradford Torrey (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1906), p. 106.

3. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), in *The Portable Darwin*, edited by Duncan M. Porter and Peter W. Graham (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 215.

4. William Tecumseh Sherman, letter, 1865, quoted in *Hours at Home: A Popular Monthly Devoted to Religious and Useful Literature*, edited by J. M. Sherwood, vol. 2, November–April 1866, p. 319.

5. Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), p. xi. Much of the following is taken from this indispensable guide to the catastrophic effects of the Civil War on all aspects of American life.

6. Walt Whitman, "When Last in the Dooryard Lilacs Bloom'd," in *The New Anthology of American Poetry*, edited by Steven Gould Axelrod, Camille Roman, and Thomas Travisano (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), p. 457.

7. Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, p. 174.

8. Quoted in Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, p. 178.

9. Michael Quick, *George Inness: A Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One, 1841–1879* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), pp. 6–8.

10. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 2 (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979), pp. 836–837.

11. Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 59, xi–xii.

12. Ibid., pp. xi–xii.

13. Drew Gilpin Faust, in *This Republic of Suffering* (p. 264), also portrays a form of this dichotomy. "The distance, the discrepancy between the one and the many juxtaposed and reinforced two modes of understanding that emerged from the Civil War experience. Sentimentality and irony grew side by side in Americans' war-born consciousness. The sentimental drew its strength from the need to resist the unintelligibility of mass death by focusing on the singularity of each causality, the tragedy of each loss. Sentimentality served as a weapon against the force of numbers, against the statistical homogenization and erasure of individuals. Irony, by contrast, emerged from acknowledgment of this fundamental tension, the admission of the almost unspeakable possibility that the individual might not matter."

14. Ibid., p. 69.

15. Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, p. 267.

16. Quoted in Barry Werth, *Banquet at Delmonico's: Great Minds, the Gilded Age, and the Triumph of Evolution in America* (New York: Random House, 2009), pp. 292, 294.

17. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (New York: Modern Library, 1996; originally published 1906), p. 39.

18. When John La Farge made the argument for his wife's conversion to Catholicism, he cited the fractured nature of the Protestant faith in his day, with its seemingly infinite array of competing factions and different ways of spirituality. See Kathleen A. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Evolutionary Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), chap. 2, "John La Farge and the Sensuous Environment."

19. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, p. 34.

20. Ibid., p. 26.

21. Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality from Emerson to Oprah* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), p. 12.

22. Quoted in George William Sheldon, "George Inness," *Harper's Weekly*, vol. 26. no. 1322 (April 22, 1882), p. 244.

23. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, in *The Tocqueville Reader: A Life in Letters and Politics*, edited by Oliver Zunz and Alan S. Kahan (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), p. 113.

24. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 42.

25. Henry David Thoreau, *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, edited by Odell Shepard (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), p. 108.

26. Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, p. 12.

27. Quoted in Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, p. 4.

28. Leigh Eric Schmidt writes of George Santayana: "... Santayana, one of whose earliest pieces was a meditation on Whitman, characterized easily marked out spirituality as the 'higher side' of religion in his monumental *Life of Reason: or, the Phases of Human Progress* in 1905: 'This aspiring side of religion may be called Spirituality.' A model for a life of simplicity, creativity, and equanimity, in Santayana's view, 'spirituality likes to say, Behold the lilies of the field!' That poetic prospect, affording such clarity about spirituality's elevation over religion, remained a largely unimagined terrain among Puritans and evangelicals. Here is the bottom line: the American invention of 'spirituality' was, in fair measure, a search for a religious world larger than the British Protestant inheritance." (*Restless Souls*, p. 5.)

29. Schmidt, *Restless Souls*, pp. 53–54.

30. Quoted in Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), p. 59.

31. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, pp. 62–63.

32. Quoted in Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 141.

33. Gura, *American Transcendentalism*, p. 62.

34. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, chap. 3, "Beauty," in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 10.

35. Ibid., p. 9.

36. Ibid., p. 11.

37. Ibid., p. 20.

38. Ibid., p. 20.

39. Quoted in Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 155.

40. Ibid., p. 154.

41. Ibid., 154.

42. John La Farge, *An Artist's Letters from Japan*, 2nd ed. (London: Kegan Paul, 2000), p. 145.

43. Diane Ackerman, "I Sing the Body's Pattern Recognition Machine," *New York Times*, June 15, 2004, p. F2. Excerpted from *An Alchemy of Mind; The Marvel and Mystery of the Brain* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

44. Emerson, *Nature*, in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 14.

45. Oscar Wilde, from *The Critic as Artist* (1890), quoted in Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), p. 144.

46. John D. Barrow, *The Artful Universe* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 104–105.

47. Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (New York: Viking Press, 2002), pp. 219–227, 220.

48. Semir Zeki, professor of neurobiology at University College London, and a key exponent of the new field of neuroaesthetics, summed up his work as follows: "What I did was to show that there are many visual areas of the brain and that different areas are specialized to process different attributes of the visual field—color, form, and motion for instance." Zeki also noted that the neural mechanisms involved in responding to "beauty" are similar to those involved with desire. *Artnews*, January 2010, p. 90. Related research in the field of neuroaesthetics has suggested that artists employ strategies of composition that trigger a strong response in the brain: exaggerating forms, isolating forms, grouping forms in suggestive patterns, using segmented shading (tones) that the eye finds easier to read than homogeneous color (soft edges rather than hard), employing visual ambiguity to stimulate the eye, creating visual metaphors by handling dissimilar objects in the same stylistic manner, and imposing a pleasing symmetry across a range of otherwise chaotic forms.

49. Quoted in Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 155.

50. Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 179.

51. William Macbeth, *Art Notes*, September 1936.

52. Quoted in Richardson, *Emerson*, pp. 185–186.

53. Barrow, *The Artful Universe*, pp. 176–181.

54. Ibid.

55. Emerson, *Nature*, chap. 6, "Idealism," in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, pp. 34–35.

56. Emerson, *Nature*, in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, pp. 10, 14.

57. Ibid., p. 10.

58. Ibid., p. 7.

59. Ibid., p. 15.

60. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Tragic* (1844), in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 1295.

61. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature*, in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 15.

62. Alice Sawtelle Randall, "Connecticut Artists and Their Work," *The Connecticut Magazine*, vol. 9 (1905), p. 142.

63. Henry David Thoreau, *The Illustrated A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 8.

64. Khyyam quoted in Randall, "Connecticut Artists and Their Work," p. 143.

65. John Burroughs, *John Burroughs' America: Selections from the Writings of the Naturalist* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), p. 5.

66. Khalil Gibran, prose-poem, "To Albert Pinkham Ryder (privately printed), quoted in Elizabeth Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1990), p. 197.

67. Richardson, *Emerson*, p. 241.

68. Randall, "Connecticut Artists and Their Work," p. 142. That the author was probably paraphrasing Foster is noted in her following sentence: "This has been Mr. Foster's experience and is, therefore, his well-founded opinion."

69. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Essays: First Series," Essay 12, *Art*, in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 431.

70. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996), p. 56.

71. Ibid., pp. 57, 81.

72. Emerson, "Essays: First Series," Essay 12, *Art*, in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 431.

73. S.C.G. Watkins, "Reminiscences of George Inness, the Great Painter, as I Knew Him" (April 14, 1928), *Montclair Times*, quoted in Adrienne Baxter Bell, ed., *George Inness: Writings and Reflections on Art and Philosophy* (New York: George Braziller, 2006), p. 231.

74. Ibid., pp. 216–217.

75. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 256.

76. Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 57.

77. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, pp. 238, 254.

78. This and the preceding two quotations are all from "Manmat'ha," *Library of American Fiction*, vol. 10 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), pp. 90–93.

79. Ibid., pp. 90–91. De Kay's narrator draws a narrow distinction between the "unseen" and spirits. "This was my first definite encounter with that unseen which I would have called a spirit had I been a spiritualist." (p. 96.)

80. Quoted in David Robinson, *Natural Life: Thoreau's Worldly Transcendentalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 110.

81. John Updike, *Due Considerations: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), p. 134.

82. For a full and fascinating examination of the influence of Darwin and Spencer in America after the Civil War, see Werth, *Banquet at Delmonico's*.

83. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, pp. 231–232.

84. Sadakichi Hartmann, "Eremites of the Brush" (June 1927), excerpted in Bell, ed., *George Inness: Writings and Reflections on Art and Philosophy*, p. 229.

85. Emma Bell Miles, "After Reading Thoreau," *The Century Magazine*, vol. 72, New Series, vol. 50, 1908: 855.

86. Henry David Thoreau, *The Annotated Walden*, edited by Philip Van Doren Stern (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1970), p. 43.

87. All quotations from Murphy's diary, letters, and clippings come from the unpublished biography of J. Francis Murphy by Dr. Emerson Crosby Kelly, an Albany, New York, physician. The typescript biography, assembled from original documents is found in the Archives of American Art, reel no. 4341.

88. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Eliot Clark, *J. Francis Murphy*, The American Artists Series (New York: privately printed by Frederic Fairchild Sherman, 1926), pp. 17, 45, 23.

89. Linda Merrill, *An Ideal Country: Paintings by Dwight William Tryon in the Freer Gallery of Art* (Washington, DC: Freer Gallery of Art, 1990), p. 67.

90. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, pp. 163–177.

91. Quoted in Ulrich W. Hiesinger, *Childe Hassam: American Impressionist* (New York: Prestel, 1994), p. 122.

92. Hiesinger, *Childe Hassam*, p. 181.

93. Shepard, ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, pp. 206, 143.

94. Ibid., p. 39.

95. Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 53.

96. Henry David Thoreau, journal April 1, 1852, quoted in Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), p. 264.

97. Quoted in Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, p. 359.

98. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, p. 360.

99. Ruskin was also a stickler for getting all the tiny details of nature right, and in so doing he was an inspiration to the Pre-Raphaelites, the Hudson River School, and their followers in America. The Tonalists dispensed with Ruskin's more finicky diligence for recording every lobe and vein of a leaf, but certainly responded to some of his ideas about color: "Whenever you lay on a mass of colour, be sure that however large it may be, or however small, it shall be gradated. No colour exists in Nature under ordinary circumstances without gradations. If you do not see this, it is the fault of your inexperience: you will see it in due time, if you practice enough." John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing in Three Letters to Beginners* (London: George Allen, 1904), p. 213.

100. Henry David Thoreau, "Autumnal Tints," in Torrey, ed, *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 285.

101. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, p. 265.

102. Ovid, *The Metamorphosis*, translated by Frank Justus Miller (London: William Heineman, 1916), p. 377.

103. Henry David Thoreau, "Journals," 1851, in Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 165.

104. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; Or, A Life in the Woods* (Cambridge, MA: Library of America), edited by Robert F. Sayre, p. 568.

105. Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) p. 68.

106. Sayre, ed., *Walden*, p. 399.

107. Quoted in John Pickles, *A History of Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.53.

108. Thoreau, "Journals," in Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 99.

109. Shepard, ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, pp. 49–50.

110. Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, & Human Evolution* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009), pp. 20.

111. Ibid., pp. 20–21. Dutton is quoting from the work of psychologists Stephen and Rachel Kaplan.

112. Quoted in Henry C. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930), p. 50.

113. Quoted in David G. Wright, *R. Swain Gifford: A Catalogue of Etchings, 1865–1891* (New Bedford, MA: New Bedford Whaling Museum, 2002), p. 181.

114. Thoreau, "Journals," 1855, in Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 14.

115. Shepard, ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, p. 144.

116. Frank Jewett Mather Jr. *Homer Martin: Poet in Landscape* (New York: privately printed, 1912) p. 71.

117. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, p. 314.

118. Quoted in Mather, *Homer Martin*, p. 71

119. Marcus Aurelius, trans. Méric Casaubon, *Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1956), p. 73.

120. Robert W. Brownell, "*Whistler in Painting and Etching*," *Scribner's Monthly*, vol. 18, no. 4 (August 1879), pp. 493–495.

121. Ibid.

122. Homer Dodge Martin and Elizabeth G. Martin, Letters to William Crary Brownell, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

123. Ibid.

124. Mather, *Homer Martin*, p. 71.

125. John Burroughs, *The Century Magazine*, vol. 24, New Series, vol. 2, May–October 1882: 369.

126. Ibid.

127. Shepard, ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, pp. 45, 47, 146.

128. Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, pp. iv, 40.

129. Thoreau, "Journals," 1854, in Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 51.

130. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), pp. 350–351.

131. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, p. 325.

132. Thoreau, "Journals," 1851, in Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 284.

133. Charles H. Caffin, *The Art of Dwight W. Tryon: An Appreciation* (New York: Forest Press, 1909), p. 9.

134. Ibid.

135. Robert Rothwell ed., *Henry David Thoreau: An American Landscape* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1991), p. 63. Eaton was a voracious reader and his bookshelves contained volumes of Emerson. It is hard to imagine that he was not also well acquainted with Thoreau, as were all Eaton's contemporaries.

136. During the Colonial era, the British Navy had first pick of the white pines on public land over a certain size, which were prized for use as ships' masts.

137. Rothwell, ed., *Henry David Thoreau: An American Landscape*, p. 46.

138. Emerson, *Nature*, chap. 4, "Language," in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 20.

139. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past (À la recherche du temps perdu)* translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Thomas Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1989), p. 134 (*Swann's Way*).

140. Ibid.

141. Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1979), p. 274.

142. William Carter, *Proust in Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 43–45. Harrison's remark, recounted by Hahn, about Penmarch reminding him of Florida, is transposed in *À la recherche* when Elstir mentions to the narrator: "I know nothing in France like it, it reminds me rather of certain aspects of Florida…I can't tell you what grace it has, what softness." *Within a Budding Grove*, pp. 913–914.

143. Cynthia J. Gamble, *Proust as Interpreter of Ruskin: The Seven Lamps of Translation* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications Inc., 2002), p. 94. "The second occasion was July 1897 when Hahn took Proust and Nodlinger to visit the American painter Alexander Harrison in his [Paris] studio."

144. Michael Murphy, *Proust and America*, (Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 196. "Certainly Proust came to recognize the importance of the meeting. In *Le Carnet de 1908* he was to note that Harrison had proved a 'stimulating guide' ['Je n'admets les autres que comme indicateurs excitants (Harrison) Floride'] (C 1908, 99). Thus a real-life American artist became first a fictional novelist ('C,' whom Jean Santeuil is introduced to at Kerengrimen) and then a painter, Elstir, whose work bears repeated comparison with another real-life American, Whistler. Clearly, then, the fusion of French and American art and landscape proved extremely important to Proust in the early development of À la recherche."

145. Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, p. 195.

146. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (*À la recherche du temps perdu*) translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Kilmartin (New York: Random House, 1989), pp. 884–885 (*Within a Budding Grove*).

147. Ibid., p. 886.

148. *Public Opinion*, Thursday, 31 October, 1901, p. 563. A writer in the New York Commercial Advertiser responded: "We are not lacking painters who take themselves and their art seriously, sticking to ideals and painting truly American subjects even though it be at some little sacrifice of the social side of things and financial returns. Surely such men as the late George Inness, Alexander Wyant, and Homer D. Martin remained true to their profession, scorning pot-boiling methods and producing truly American themes." Alexander Harrison's prickly defense of his expatriate status rings true with Proust's description of Elstir as imbuing those who had known him, or had misunderstood or offended him, "with a loftier idea of himself…."

149. Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, pp. 892, 894.

150. Ibid., p. 897.

151. Ibid., p. 861.

152. Ibid., p. 929.

153. Ibid., pp. 770–71, 773.

154. Ibid., pp. 923–24.

155. Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way: A Field Guide to In Search of Lost Time* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), p. 154.

156. Proust quoted in Gamble, *Proust as Interpreter of Ruskin*, p. 41.

157. Quoted in Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, p. 170.

158. Emerson, *Nature*, chap. 3, "Beauty," in Porte, ed., *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, p. 18.

159. Dutton, *The Art Instinct*, pp. 120–121. The quotations are from E. O. Wilson's *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998).

160. Ibid.

161. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*, "Essays: First Series" (1841), Essay 4, *The Over Soul*, edited by Joel Porte (New York: Library of America/Literary Classics of the United States, 1983), p. 386.

162. La Farge, *An Artist's Letters from Japan* p. 146.

163. Ibid.

164. Charles de Kay, writing under the pseudonym Henry Eckford (Eckford was his maternal grandfather and a famed naval architect), *The Century Magazine*, vol. 24, New Series, vol. 2, May–October 1882: 62.

165. George Inness Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness* (New York: Kennedy Galleries and Da Capo Press, 1969; originally published 1917 [Century Co.]), p. 276.

166. Ibid., pp. 276–277.

167. Caffin, *The Art of Dwight W. Tryon*, p. 5.

168. "Water-Lilies," in *The Magnificent Activist: The Writings of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 1823–1911*, edited by Howard N. Meyer (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), p. 426.

169. *The Century Magazine*, vol. 40, New Series, vol. 18, May–October 1890: 568.

170. *The Century Magazine*, vol. 25, New Series, vol. 3, November 1882–October 1883: 420.

171. Ibid., p. 432

172. Thoreau, "Journals," 1861, in Torrey, ed., *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 77.

173. Shepard ed., *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*, pp. 185–186.

174. Dwight Tryon to his dealer Montross, quoted in Henry C. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon*, p. 172.

175. White, *The Life and Art of Dwight William Tryon*, p. 153.

176. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, p. 388. Adams wrote of Saint-Gaudens and Matthew Arnold: "Neither of them felt goddesses as power—only as reflected emotion, human expression, beauty, purity, taste, scarcely even as sympathy. They felt a railway train a power; yet they, and all other artists, constantly complained that the power embodied in a railway train could never be embodied in art." (Ibid.) Thoreau, in fact, embraced the coming of the railroad to Concord and Walden Pond; it brought news of the universe and opened the tree canopy for the growth of huckleberries, while the railway cutting provided him with fascinating observations of nature.

177. Dwight Tryon, letter to Charles Lang Freer, 1907. Quoted in Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, p. 1.

178. La Farge, *An Artist's Letters from Japan*, (New York: The Century Company, 1903), p. 174.

179. George Levine, *Darwin Loves You: Natural Selection and the Re-Enchantment of the World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. xvii.

180. Levine cites a recent historian who notes, "Darwin's writing belongs to a great tradition of romantic literature and thinking that imagines nature, with all its obvious horrors, as essentially benevolent and altruistic—quite the reverse of what many modern uses of 'natural selection' describe." (p. 41.)

181. Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 140.

182. Khalil Gibran, prose-poem, "To Albert Pinkham Ryder," 1915, quoted in "The Most Imaginative Painter This Country Has Yet Produced," *Current Opinion*, January–June 1917, p. 351.

183. Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, p. 287.

184. Ibid., pp. 288, 329.

185. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, letters, 1897–98, quoted in Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, pp. 1–2.

186. George Inness Jr., *Life, Art, and Letters of George Inness*, pp. 280–281.

187. Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 146.

188. Quoted in Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 358. James was devoted to Emerson, speaking at the one-hundredth anniversary of his birth; his pragmatism reflects the Emersonian strain of individualism and distrust of systems still strong in 1900, even as it downplays Emerson's devotion to notions of the individual conscience and the Transcendentalist belief in an overriding spiritual authority.

189. Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, p. 628.

190. Quoted in Robert D. Richardson, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007), p. 356.

191. Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 371.

192. George Inness, *Suggestions by an Artist* (1882), quoted in Nicolai Cikovsky Jr., and Michael Quick, *George Inness* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985), p. 36.

193. Charles de Kay, "Surrender," *Hesperus and Other Poems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), p. 192.

194. Edmond C. Steadman in his "Poets of America" wrote: "Charles de Kay is conspicuous for heights of aim and certainly for most resolute purpose…'Hesperus' and the 'Poems of Barnaval' show his impassioned and more subjective moods, and his resources for a prodigal display of varied, uneven, but often strongly effective lyrical work." Quoted in *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, vol. 9 (New York: James T. White & Company, 1899), p. 206.

195. Quoted in David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 235. Reynolds describes Whitman's body-soul dynamic as "establishing at once the interpenetration and cross-fertilization between matter and spirit that is felt in virtually all his major poems. The early and the divine, the sensuous and the mystical, are never far from each other in his verse. His images flow rapidly from the minutiae of plant or animal life through parts of the human body to sweeping vistas of different times and places, often with affirmations of God's harmonious universe." (p. 235)

196. Walt Whitman, "Poem of Wonder at the Resurrection of the Wheat," *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1904), p. 296.

197. Quoted in Richardson, *William James*, p. 305.

198. Quoted in Jonah Lehrer, *Proust Was a Neuroscientist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2007), p. 153.

199. Ibid., p. 153.

200. "The Jolly Corner," in *The Portable Henry James*, edited by John Auchard (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001), p. 296.

201. Ibid., p. 296.

202. Quoted in Richardson, *William James*, p. 306

203. Ibid., pp. 306–307.

204. Ibid., p. 415.

205. Birge Harrison, *Landscape Painting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), pp. 155–56.

206. Kathleen Pyne, in *Art and the Higher Life: Painting and Thought in Late Nineteenth-Century America*, elaborates a wider thesis for the role of Darwinism in the aesthetic sphere, especially in its Spencerian guise of providing class solidarity and justification for the dominance of the Protestant establishment over competing groups from below. She argues that many of the American Impressionists (Twachtman, Weir, Metcalf, and usually Hassam) turned away from traditional high-keyed facture in the late 1890s and opted for Tonalism's low-toned harmonies in solidarity with a prevailing upper-class or Protestant consciousness, which gravitated toward an elevated spirituality and the higher life. (p. 282.) She notes that Twachtman was married in a Swedenborgian church and that his Tonalist winter landscapes represented a kind of healing medium between conflicting modes of spirituality. "The winter landscapes positively answered the problems posed by Darwinism: they denied the finality of death, and they conformed to the evolutionary program by insisting on a higher, more civilized, anti-animalistic destiny for human culture." (p. 281.)

207. Quoted in Levine, *Darwin Loves You*, p. 31.

208. Levine, *Darwin Loves You*, p. 211.

209. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, p. 22.

210. John Fiske, *Outlines Of Cosmic Philosophy, Based on the Doctrine of Evolution, with Criticisms on the Positive Philosophy*, vol. 4 (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1904), p. 165.

211. Ibid., pp. 165–167.

212. Richardson, *Henry Thoreau*, p. 245.

213. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, April 16, 1916.

214. Quoted in Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 68.

215. Burroughs, *John Burroughs's America*, p. 20.

216. Theodore Roosevelt, *A Book-Lover's Holidays in the Open* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. vii.

217. Adams, Education, p. 176.

218. Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, p. 374.

219. H. W. Bands, *The Reckless Decade, America in the 1890s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 126–127.

220. Walt Whitman, *The Gathering of the Forces* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), p. 209.

221. *Letters of Richard Watson Gilder*, edited by his daughter, Rosamond Gilder (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916), p. 139.

222. Ibid., p 141.

223. Quoted in Hans Huth, *Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), p. 127.

224. Pyne, *Art and the Higher Life*, p 144.

225. Ibid., p. 145.

226. Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007; originally published 1873), pp. 172–173.

227. *The Century Magazine*, vol. 72, New Series, vol. 2, May–October 1906: 18.

228. Agnes de Mille, *Where the Wings Grow* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1978), pp. 61–62.

229. Burroughs, *John Burroughs' America*, p. 5 (originally published in *The Century Magazine*, vol. 25, New Series, vol. 3, 1883).

230. Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer, 1865–1915* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 345.

231. Ibid., pp. 349–350.

232. Henry Ward Beecher, *Star Papers, or, Experiences of Art and Nature* (New York: J. C. Derby, 1855), p. 122.

233. This and the preceding two quotations are all from Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, pp. 8–9.

234. Quoted in George Inness Jr., *Life, Art and Letters of George Inness*, pp. 124–125.

235. Ibid., pp. 277–278.

CHAPTER EIGHT (pp. 439–570)

1. Charles de Kay, *The International Monthly*, January–June 1900, p. 85.

2. Ernest Knaufft, *The International Studio*, vol. 22 (1900), p. 151. Knaufft noted Chase's huge influence as a teacher. "It is, perhaps not an exaggeration to say that in the families of one-half of the picture buyers of New York there will be found a member who has studied some time or other under Mr. Chase at the League, or in his private studio, or in the New York Art School, of which he is at present the head. These disciples of his have become the leaven of the large loaf of New York's art patrons, and influence public taste for the best." p. 157.

3. Richard Dorment, *James McNeill Whistler*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1994), p. 285

4. Charles de Kay, *The International Monthly*, January–June 1900, p. 97.

5. *Biographical Sketches of American Artists* (Lansing, MI: Michigan State Library, 1912), p. 174.

6. Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer, 1865–1915* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 195. Brooks also included the architects H.H. Richardson and Louis Sullivan among those Americans who had slipped the chains of European tradition to found a distinct American vocabulary in building styles, teachers of Charles McKim and Stanford White, and Frank Lloyd Wright. "They were builders in the line of Emerson and Whitman, who had established the principles on which they build…They showed that a native integrity was better than any borrowed nobility, the triumphs of which, if more obvious, were far more facile.…" (p. 196).

7. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, July 7, 1901. De Kay thought the Pan-American Exposition of 1901 was the finest and most comprehensive exhibition of American painting up to that day, better than the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, and better than what could be seen in the annual Paris salons or the British Royal Academy exhibitions. "It also shows Americans starting on independent lines, not copying others, but being themselves flattered by imitation." The medal awards at Buffalo consisted of a who's who of the major Tonalists.

8. Review by Grace Wickham Curran, *Modern Culture*, September 1901, pp. 7–8. Curran also noted, following de Kay's observations, that the works by "Franco- and Anglo-Americans" had been given their own gallery, a way of further defining the heartland Americans. Curran was utterly dismissive of the storytelling pictures of the die-hards of genre like J. G. Brown: "They tell a story with photographic attention to the smallest details, but are lacking in every one of the artistic qualities, such as color, values, tonality, subtle drawing and decorative composition. They have not one claim upon the attention of the student of art, except perhaps as curiosities, and yet this little gallery is the most popular one in the building."

9. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, December 6, 1904.

10. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, January 8, 1905. Another New York *Times* writer referred to the show on December 10, 1904, as "an exhibition of native and foreign tonal landscapes and figure paintings."

11. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, November 20, 1904.

12. Ernest Knaufft, review, in *Review of Reviews and World's Work*, 1905, pp. 77–80.

13. Leila Mechlin, (1874–1949), in *Appleton's Magazine*, 1905, pp. 27–33. Mechlin was Secretary of the American Federation of the Arts and a critic for *International Studio*.

14. Louis Ehrich, editorial, *New York Times*, December 1, 1904. Ehrich was a scholar and collector of sixteenth- through eighteenth-century art.

15. Christian Brinton, "The Case for American Art," *The Century Magazine*, vol. 76, New Series, vol. 55, November 1908–April 1909, p. 141.

16. William Macbeth, *Art Notes, Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Number*, 1927, p. 1525.

17. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, May 26, 1900.

18. Sadakichi Hartmann, *The Whistler Book* (Boston: L.C. Page & Co., 1910), p. 92.

19. Ibid., pp. 168–169. Hartmann's dedication reads: "To those painters upon whose shoulders the black mantle of Whistler's muse may fall."

20. Quoted in Jack Becker, *Henry Ward Ranger and the Humanized Landscape*, exh. cat. (Old Lyme, CT: Florence Griswold Museum, 1999), p. 28. Leigh Hunt, who wrote for *The Collector*, titled two of his articles "Tonality," and "A Further Word on Tonality."

21. [probably Charles de Kay], *New York Times*, November 8, 1901.

22. Thos. A. Sanders, "An Ideal Printing Paper for Tonalists," *Camera and Dark Room*), edited by James B. Chalmers, vol. 8 (1905), p. 390.

23. The term "Tonal School" was used in an article on F. Ballard Williams in a 1897 issue of *International Studio*.

24. *Brush and Pencil*, vol. 17, no. 5 (May 1906), p. 179. Epitomized by Inness, Ranger, Martin, Wyant, Ochtman, and De Haven, the writer characterized the artists of the tonal school: "all alike in this, that they are transcribers of nature's beauties, not in a bald, literal way, not with a view to photographic accuracy, not with the aim to get a balanced aggregation of forms and colors, but with the purpose of imparting a sentiment, a mood, a subtle meaning, that the rank and file of every-day observers miss…their best work always has the elusive charm that is akin to mystery, wonderment, devotion."

25. Ernest Knaufft, "American Painting To-Day," in *The American Review of Reviews* (New York: The Review of Reviews Corp. [Albert Shaw]), 1907, p. 687. "It is perhaps in our landscapes that we find most saliently the 'tuneful sweet' attribute of American painting. Should one select Weir, Hassam, Walker, Metcalf, Tryon, and Ranger, as typical landscapists, he would find that there were no harsh notes, no forced passages, no keyed-up color, in any of their paintings. …Our artists are slowly working toward an American school that is honestly native, without any transmuted foreign conceptions of what a picture ought to be…." pp. 695–696.

26. Charles Caffin, *A Child's Guide to Pictures* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1908), pp. 213–14. The popularity of Caffin's book is attested to by a reprint in 1910 and again in 1913, re-titled as *A Guide to Pictures for Beginners and Students*.

27. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 4, 1909.

28. Sadakichi Hartmann, *Landscape and Figure Composition* (The Baker and Taylor Company, 1910), p. 52.

29. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April 2, 1911.

30. Dr. Ralcy Husted Bell, *The Philosophy of Painting: A Study of the Development of the Art from Prehistoric to Modern Times* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, The Knickerbocker Press, 1916), pp. 177–178.

31. Margaret Steele Anderson, *The Study of Modern Painting* (New York: The Century Company, 1914), p. 216.

32. Julia de Forest and Charles Caffin, *A Short History of Art*, "edited,

revised, and largely rewritten" by Charles Caffin (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1921), p. 708. Caffin's reputation and popularity was at its height in the decades after 1900, which explains his selection to revise de Forest's best selling history, and the wide acknowledgment of his understanding of the contribution of the Tonalist movement to American art. Caffin in his *The Story of French Painting* (New York: The Century Co., 1915), p. 142, uses the term *tonalist* to describe the work of Rousseau. Julia de Forest, *A Short History of Art* (1921), pp. 712–714.

33. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Within a Budding Grove* (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 863.

34. Charles de Kay, *The Bohemian: A Tragedy of Modern Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), pp. 26-27, 6.

35. In an 1881 *Atlantic Magazine* review of recent poetry, Charles de Kay is identified as a new voice, distinct from older poets like Whittier or Bryant. "Without being an imitator, by any means, he seems naturally to ally himself with Swinburne and Morris, and to some extent with Browning also; though he certainly is not *like* them. It is partly in the choice of theme, partly in his eager and full response to sensuous beauty, that he recalls the first two; and in occasional turns of phrase or uncouth constructions that he makes one think, at instants, of Browning." *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XLVII (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1881), p. 857.

36. Peter Gay, in his *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), documents this anti-establishment stance of modernism from Baudelaire and Whistler to the present, noting its earliest incarnation: "Art, so this doctrine goes, serves no one but itself— not mammon, not God, not country, not bourgeois self-glorification, certainly not moral progress. It boasts its own techniques and standards, its own ideals and gratifications." p. 53.

37. Quoted in Elizabeth Milroy, *Painters of a New Century: The Eight and American Art*, exh. cat. (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Art Museum, 1991), p. 62.

38. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 6, 1898.

39. Milroy, p. 64.

40. Quoted in Milroy, p. 66.

41. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, May 1, 1902.

42. William Macbeth, *Art Notes, Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Number*, 1927, p. 1531.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., pp. 1533–1536.

45. *Catalogue of the Private Art Collection of Thomas B. Clarke*, Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Art 1891, p. 31.

46. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, May 24, 1891.

47. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Jan. 28, 1893.

48. This and the preceding quotations are from "Art and How to Disseminate a Proper Appreciation of It in Our Communities," *New York Times*, February 27, 1897.

49. *Catalogue of the Collection of William T. Evans*, 1900, pp. 21–22. Coffin wrote all the artist biographies and description of paintings to be auctioned with the sole exception of his own biography, which was written by de Kay.

50. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Dec. 7, 1904. The article describes an auction of 132 paintings by Coffin, Edward Gay, Carlton Chapman, and Carl J. Blenner, half of which were by Coffin.

51. Charles Caffin, *The New York American*, March 8, 1915. Archives of American Art, Charles Henry Caffin Papers, Scrapbooks, 1913–1915.

52. Quoted in William Macbeth, *Art Notes*, 1916, p. 930.

53. This first exhibition of American artists at the Luxembourg in 1919, made up of 125 paintings from America, 25 from Americans working in Paris, and 50 from the collection of the Luxembourg, constituted a broad cross section of the best contemporary American artists from Henri, Kent, Mora, Kroll, Luks, and Bellows among the modernists, also including a large contingent of the Tonalists, all old men whose careers were fading: Coffin, Davis, Foster, Hugh Bolton Jones, Lathrop, Weir, Chauncey Ryder, to name only a few.

54. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 6, 1898.

55. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April 3, 1903.

56. *Brush and Pencil*, Vol. XVII, May 1906, No. 5, pp. 179,181.

57. In these years around 1906 De Haven spent time painting along the coast of Maine, and in the fall of 1905 spent time in Mystic, Connecticut, with trips to Mason's Island, a favorite haunt of Henry Ward Ranger. *New York Times*, April 1, 1906.

58. *New York Times*, January 21, 1906.

59. *New York Times*, obituary, Jan. 11, 1934.

60. Arthur Hoeber, "A Summer in Brittany" *The Monthly Illustrator* 4, no. 2 (1895), p. 78.

61. *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, vol. 57, New Series, vol. 35, November 1898–April, 1899: 740.

62. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 9, 1902.

63. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 15, 1903.

64. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 29, 1903.

65. Arthur Hoeber, *Century Magazine*, vol. 70, New Series, vol. 47, May 1905 – October 1905: 157.

66. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1904.

67. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1909.

68. Quoted in Claude Raguet Hirst, *Transforming the American Still Life* (Columbus, OH: Columbus Museum of Art, 2005), p. 55.

69. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April 2, 1911.

70. Quoted in James Timothy Voorhies, ed., *My Dear Stieglitz: Letters of Marsden Hartley and Alfred Stieglitz, 1912–1915* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 202.

71. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, December 28, 1883.

72. William Coffin, *Private Art Collection of Thomas B. Clarke* (New York: American Art Galleries, 1899), p. 7.

73. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, February 5, 1899.

74. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, February 18, 1899.

75. Ibid.

76. Excluding portraits, genre subjects, and works of religious subject matter, the Tonalist landscapes Evans collected, sold, and gave to museums are, with a few exceptions, some of the finest works by the artists; many if not most were acquired directly from the artists. A representative list of the Tonalist landscapes once owned by Evans as compiled by William Truettner demonstrates the collector's keen eye: Blakelock (thirty-five), George Bogert (seven), William Gedney Bunce (ten), William Coffin (five), Bruce Crane (five), Leon Dabo (two), Louis Dessar (thirteen), Charles Melville Dewey (fifteen), Thomas Dewing (six), Charles Warren Eaton (three), Ben Foster (three), Robert Swain Gifford (seven), George Inness (thirty-four), Frederick W. Kost (four), William Lathrop (five), Homer Dodge Martin (twenty-eight), Robert Minor (sixteen), J. Francis Murphy (seventeen), Leonard Ochtman (two), Robert Loftin Newman (seven), Henry Ward Ranger (twenty-nine), Theodore Robinson (nine), Albert Pinkham Ryder (nine), William Sartain (four), Dwight Tryon (eight), John Twachtman (twenty-one), Alexander Van Laer (four), Alexander Wyant (forty-two). From a checklist of American paintings acquired by William T. Evans, cited in William Truettner, "William T. Evans, Collector of American Paintings," *The American Art Journal*, vol. 3 (Fall 1971), pp. 72–79.

77. Charles de Kay letter quoted in William H. Truettner, "William T.

Evans, Collector of American Paintings," *The American Art Journal*, vol. 3 (Fall 1971), p. 56.

78. Truettner, p. 67.

79. Macbeth quoted in Truettner, *Art Notes*, Macbeth Gallery, January 1919, pp. 1119–1121.

80. De Kay quoted in Truettner, p. 56, from an article by Charles de Kay: "The Evans Collection of American Paintings at Washington," *International Studio*, vol. 48, February 1913, p. xc.

81. *New York Times*, January 23, 1913.

82. *New York Times*, February 16, 1917.

83. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, February 27, 1918.

84. Quoted in *New York Times*, February 27, 1918.

85. As a joint conference report put it: "If the Society has become more conservative, the Academy has become more liberal, and today, the two exhibitions, held in the same building and managed, largely by the same men, are so nearly alike that it would sometimes be difficult to know, if one were set down suddenly in one of them without a catalogue, which of the two it was. ... It is evident that such duplication of function causes great waste of effort and labor, and that the two bodies are doing work which might be better and more economically performed by one." Quoted in Eliot Clark, *History of the National Academy of Design, 1825–1953* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), p. 109.

86. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 11, 1906.

87. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, May 27, 1906.

88. Barse quoted in *New York Times*, April 1, 1906.

89. Eliot Clark, *History*, p. 171. For a poignant description of the foundering reputations of many of the older Academicians, especially members of the Hudson River School and genre painters, in the first years of the twentieth century, see pages 171–176 of Clark's history.

90. Ibid., p. 172.

91. Ibid., pp. 177–182.

92. Bennard B. Perlman, *The Immortal Eight: American Painting from Eakins to the Armory Show, 1870–1913* (Westport, CT: North Light Publishers, 1979), pp. 15–17.

93. Bernard B, Perlman, *Robert Henri, His Life and Art* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991), p. 21; Perlman, *The Immortal Eight*, p. 37.

94. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 29, 1902.

95. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April, 9, 1902.

96. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, January 20, 1904.

97. Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, reprint of 1923 edition, p. 12.

98. Quoted in Perlman, *Robert Henri*, p. 44.

99. Quoted in Milroy, *Painters of a New Century*, p. 48.

100. Ibid.

101. Quoted in Perlman, *The Immortal Eight*, p. 181.

102. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 16, 1908.

103. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April 11, 1909.

104. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, February 6, 1910.

105. Ibid.

106. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, February 6, 1910.

107. John La Farge, *The Higher Life in Art* (New York: The McClure Company, 1908), pp. 29–30.

108. Joseph Pennell, *New York Times*, March 9, 1913.

109. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April 15, 1901.

110. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, February 4, 1899.

111. Arthur Hoeber, *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, vol. 70, New Series: vol. 48, May 1905–October 1905: 636.

112. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, Feb. 12, 1903.

113. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, January 29, 1906.

114. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, January 25, 1909.

115. Ibid.

116. "He returned to New York from a sanitarium at Watkins Glen, N.Y., last Thursday, and was in cheerful spirits up to early afternoon yesterday, when he felt a slight nausea as he was about to go for a walk. He lay down on his bed and in a few moments was dead." *New York Times*, November 8, 1916.

117. *New York Times*, February 15, 1917.

118. *New York Times*, March 31, 1917. In the Ranger sale, the Tonalist artist William Coffin acquired a few bargains.

119. Quoted in Charles Teaze Clark, "The Touch of Man: The Landscapes of Bruce Crane," in Charles Teaze Clark, *Bruce Crane (1857–1937): American Tonalist* (Old Lyme, CT: Lyme Historical Society, Florence Griswold Museum, 1984), p. 7.

120. *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, "The Summer Haunts of American Artists," May 1885–October 1885, vol. 30, New Series, vol. 8: 850–851.

121. James Townsend, *New York Times*, April 4, 1897.

122. Quoted in William Gerdts, "The Society of American Landscape Painters," in Ralph Sessions et al., *The Poetic Vision: American Tonalism*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005), p. 41; Bruce Crane, "Objective and Subjective Painting," *Art Amateur* 36 (May 1897), p. 114.

123. Quoted in Clark, p. 11.

124. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, January 5, 1901.

125. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April 15, 1908.

126. *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, "The Summer Haunts of American Artists," May 1885–October 1885, vol. 30, New Series, vol. 8: 845

127. Charles Harold Davis quoted in *New York Times*, Sunday Magazine section, April 8, 1906.

128. *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, "The Summer Haunts of American Artists," May 1885–Oct. 1885, vol. 30, New Series, vol. 8, p. 856.

129. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 4, 1894.

130. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, March 25, 1899.

131. Charles de Kay, *New York Times*, April 3, 1904.

132. Nettleton quoted in *New York Times*, April 8, 1906. The *Art Notes* writer for the *Times* quotes the artist on results of the past season: "It has not been a favorable one for painters of Winter landscapes, but, notwithstanding this, I have been exceedingly busy and have made many studies of our New England Winter effects, and have turned out rather more than my usual average of finished pictures. These have been mostly snow effects, including a number of moonlights, in which I have taken a special interest."

133. Henry David Thoreau, *An American Landscape*, edited and illustrated by Robert Rothwell (New York: Marlowe Company, 1991), p. 187.

134. Thoreau, Rothwell, p. 171, 191, March 19, 1859.

135. Quoted in George Moore Fairchild, *From My Quebec Scrapbook* (Quebec: Frank Carell, 1907), p. 138.

136. Arthur Hoeber, "Birge Harrison, N.A., Landscape Painter," *The International Studio*, vol. 44, no. 173, July, 1911, p. iv.

137. John E.D. Trask, "Birge Harrison," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 42, July–December 1907, p. 584.

138. Charles Caffin, *New York American*, May 11, 1914. Archives of American Art, Caffin scrapbooks, 1913–1915, p. 42.

139. Birge Harrison, "The Woodstock School of Landscape Painting," *Art and Progress*, vol. 1, no. 11, Sept. 1910, p. 318-319.

140. Birge Harrison, *Landscape Painting* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), pp. 131–136.

141. Charles Caffin, "American Painters of the Sea," *The Critic*, vol. 2, 1903, p. 558.

142. Ibid., p. 558.

143. William Keith quoted in Harvey L. Jones, *Twilight and Reverie: California Tonalist Painting, 1890–1930*, exh. cat. (Oakland, CA: The Oakland Museum of California, 1995), p. 4.

144. Ibid., p. 5.

145. Diane Pietrucha Fischer, "Alfred Stieglitz and Tonalism: The Americanization of Pictorial Photography," in Sessions, et al., *The Poetic Vision*, p. 92.

146. Stieglitz, quoted in William Inness Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1977), p. 23.

147. Stieglitz quoted in Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz*, p. 32.

148. Fischer, p. 96.

149. Quoted in Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde*, p. 68.

150. Quoted in Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the American Avant-Garde*, p. 69.

151. *New York Times*, March 6, 1902.

152. Cook was first a critic of Inness, and later a supporter, and subsequently a participant in the founding of the Society of American Artists and the more progressive art of the day. The cover of Cook's *The House Beautiful* was designed by Daniel Cottier, the dealer who supported Ryder and William Gedney Bunce early in their careers. Many of the illustrations of furniture in *The House Beautiful* were items made or imported by Cottier & Co. Cook's chapters in the *The House Beautiful* were first published in *Scribner's Monthly* from June 1875 to May 1877, one of many connections he maintained with the Gilder circle.

153. Clarence Cook, *The House Beautiful* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), p. 22. (Reprint of *The House Beautiful*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881.)

154. Oscar Wilde, "L'Envoi" (1882), quoted in Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996), p. 148.

155. Charles de Kay, *The Art Work of Louis C. Tiffany*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1914), p. 16 (Apollo Book reprint of 1914 edition).

156. As the contemporary artist James Turrell noted about his art and the subdued spaces that provide a setting for his contemplative pieces: "Sure you surrender.... My spaces are dim because low light opens the pupil, and then feeling comes out in the eye as touch, a sensuous act." Quoted in *New York Times Magazine*, December 2, 2007, p. 195.

157. Quoted in Nancy E. Green, *Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922): His Art and His Influence*, exh. cat. (New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1999), p. 20.

158. Ibid.

159. Ibid., p. 22.

160. *Composition* was formulated around the three pictorial elements of line, *notan* (a Japanese notion akin to values, or light and dark areas in a two- dimensional composition that project on the surface plane and not in depth), and color. With the compositional framework, Dow dissects the basic elements of design: opposition, transition, subordination, repetition, and symmetry. He employs in his illustrative examples motifs drawn from nature, including landscapes of Ipswich and various plants and organic forms. This concentration on broad natural forms and their arrangement on the surface plane, drawn directly from Asian art and the Tonalist tradition, emphasizes a symbolist rendering, which in the fine arts serves as the basis for exploration of mystery and spirituality, and in the decorative arts yields pleasing and fascinating designs. Dow was a reductivist, always trying to go to the heart of the matter by tapping into the inner energy of art, by simplifying and eliminating, and thus eliciting the poetry and soundless music of existence.

161. Quoted in Green, p. 32.

162. Quoted in Newlin Price, *International Studio*, July 1922. Reprinted in *The Art of Emil Carlsen* (A Rubicon-Wortsman Rowe Publication, 1975), p. 53.

163. Price, *International Studio*, July 1922, p. 53.

164. Eliot Cark, reprinted from *Scribner's Magazine*, December 1919, p. 75.

165. Ibid.

166. Ibid., p. 72.

167. Duncan Phillips, Emil Carlsen, *The International Studio*, June 1917, p. 67.

168. Ibid.

169. (possibly Charles de Kay), *New York Times*, review, March 6, 1908.

170. Charles de Kay, review,*New York Times*, April 4, 1909.

171. Charles de Kay, review, *New York Times*, March 2, 1913.

172. Bennard B. Perlman, *The Lives, Loves, and Art of Arthur B. Davies* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 222.

173. Quoted in Perlman, *The Lives, Loves, and Art of Arthur B. Davies*, p. 234.

174. At the opening dinner celebrating the Armory Show, John Quinn, member of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, the group responsible for the exhibition, stated the purpose of the Americans: "The members of the association have shown you that American artists—young American artists, that is—do not dread, and have no need to dread, the ideas or the culture of Europe. They believe that in the domain of art only the best should rule. This exhibition will be epoch making in the history of American art. Tonight will be the red-letter night in the history not only of American but of all modern art." Quoted in Milton W. Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (Greenwich, CT: The Joseph H. Hirshhorn Foundation; distr. New York Graphic Society, 1963), p. 26.

175. Milton W. Brown, *American Painting, from the Armory Show to the Depression* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 3–4. Brown both critiques Henri's work and makes the point that Henri was fully part of his generation of Tonalists. "Today his painting seems no different from that of many of his conservative contemporaries, fitting neatly into the tradition of superficial and brilliant brushwork, certainly not radical or revolutionary, as it was then considered. His work was distinctly mediocre, inferior to Sargent's and even Chase's. All his painting suffers from superficiality, for he lacked the ability to think deeply in artistic terms, although he was quite capable of doing so in human terms" (p. 10). Brown's perspective of mid-century, when American modernism was riding high on the world stage, is perhaps understandable: political, social, and formalist criteria were the sine qua non of what constituted progressive art. Twenty-some years later in 1977, Brown had not changed his tune, writing in his textbook on American art (a textbook used in college courses for a generation): "Though Inness had some influence on Wyant and Martin, he had no direct heirs, except perhaps for Dwight W. Tryon (1849–1925), very popular in his own day but quite neglected now. Like Inness, Tryon sought a lyrical mood in the half-light of dawn and twilight, in the mystery of vaguely defined forms, but his work is more obvious and so more sentimental. Despite Martin's timid stab at Impressionism and the personal poeticism of Inness, the American Romantic landscapists were essentially retardetaire, carrying the earlier native tradition to its ultimate demise." Milton W. Brown, *American Art to 1900: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), p. 558. Brown does note the important contribution of Hunt, La Farge and Ryder to American art, "the New Romantics" in his terms, but passes quickly over the Tonalist landscape tradition in a few sentences, lingering briefly on the Impressionists, although they, too, disappoint, as the only sign of a progressive force in American painting before 1900.

176. John Canaday, review, *New York Times*, April 5, 1963.

177. Brown's *Story of the Armory Show* is an otherwise well-written, wonderfully detailed, and fascinating account based on primary sources. Interestingly, in his earlier book, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression* (see note 175), Brown used the term "Tonalist" twice: once to contrast "the poetic mood of the Tonalists" to the Impressionists, p. 55; and to describe Arthur B. Davies: "A product of the Tonalist school of painting and Whistler, he had developed a unique decorative style" (p. 61). Brown never elaborates on these usages or provides a larger context, but it does illustrate how the term, Tonalist, survived in the academic lexicon from the teens and twenties into mid-century, where it was then picked up in the 1960s and 1970s and put back in circulation. (Eliot Clark in his *History of the National Academy of Design* [1954] employed the term "tonal school," and "tonal movement," in full context.)

178. Brown, *American Painting from the Armory Show to the Depression*, p. 59.

179. Charles de Kay, "American Pictures at the International Exhibition Show Influence of Modern Foreign Schools," *New York Times*, March 2, 1913.

180. Ibid.

181. Quoted in Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show*, p. 148.

182. Charles Caffin, "International Still Stirs the Public," *New York American,* March 10, 1913, quoted in Elizabeth Broun, *Albert Pinkham Ryder,* exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution 1989), p. 2.

183. Sarah Greenough, ed., *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2000), p. 38.

184. Ibid.

185. George Inness, "A Painter on Painting," *Harpers's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 56 (December 1877–May 1878), p. 458.

186. Greenough, *Modern Art and America*, p. 44.

187. Quoted in Ruth E. Fine, *John Marin*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art; New York: Abbeville Press, 1990), p. 103. Charles Caffin's essay served as the introduction to the catalog of Marin's 1909 show and was reprinted in *Camera Work* 27 (July 1909). This is another indication of the synergy between critics, galleries, and artists promoting modernism in its post-Tonalism guise.

188. Marin quoted in Greenough, *Modern Art and America, Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, p. 129.

189. Stieglitz quoted in Greenough, *Modern Art and America, Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, p. 306.

190. Hartley quoted in Barbara Haskell, *Marsden Hartley*, exh. cat. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, in association with New York University Press, 1980), p. 11.

191. Hartmann quoted in Jane Calhoun Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann: Critical Modernist* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), p. 189.

192. Ibid., 189.

193. The German-born Oscar Bluemner (1867–1938) was particularly interesting in this regard, rejecting the pure abstraction of Kandinsky for the empirical abstraction of the natural world, as found in German Expressionism. Bluemner believed the artist projected his inner states onto the particulars of time and place, and from this mix of objective and subjective emotional states, the art work gained its peculiar life. His brand of symbolic Tonalism only gained force in the 1920s and 1930s. Many of Bluemner's ideas and his critique of Armory Show—and it critics—were first exposed on the pages of Stieglitz's *Camera Work*.

194. Quoted in Weaver, *Sadakichi Hartmann*, p. 25.

195. O'Keeffe quoted in Greenough, *Modern Art and America, Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries,* p. 310.

196. Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 198.

197. Ibid., p. 41.

198. Quoted in Elizabeth Hutton Turner, *In the American Grain: Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Alfred Stieglitz—The Stieglitz Circle at the Phillips Collection* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1995), p. 14.

199. Quoted in Erika D. Passantino, ed., *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making* (Washington, DC: Phillips Collection; in association with Yale University Press, 1999), p. 141.

200. Passantino, *The Eye of Duncan Phillips*, p. 128.

201. Letters from Phillips and Stieglitz included in Turner, *In the American Grain,* p. 124. Stieglitz wrote on December 11, 1926, in response to Phillips: "I agree with you that Homer, Twachtman and Ryder are three American giants. Of course I place Ryder above Homer and Twachtman. A colossal figure. And before Marin gets through he'll prove that his is equally colossal."

202. Dove took the lead of a German biologist, Ernest Haeckel, whose translation of *The Wonders of Life* (1905) did much to shape Dove's approach to the archetypal forms found in nature. In this manner, Dove reverse-engineered the methods of the Aesthetic movement, which imposed decorative form on nature, by building up from a few basic organic shapes and organizing them in rhythmic echoing patterns. Phillips noted Dove's reversal of the inherited tradition when he wrote to Dove: "When there is a hint of great things going on in the mind of the artist and of his consciousness of the rhythm of the universe, abstract art ceases to be an amusement for the aesthete and becomes a divine activity." Quoted in Turner, *In the American Grain*, p. 26.

203. Quoted in Turner, *In the American Grain*, p. 26.

204. "The Ethereal Art of Leon and Theodore Dabo," *Current Literature*, November 1906, p. 528.

205. "Leon Dabo—Landscape Painter," *The International Studio*, vol. 34, no. 155, January 1910, p. lv.

206. Joseph Pennell, *The Adventures of an Illustrator* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1925), pp. 356–361.

207. Macbeth, *Memorial Exhibition Catalogue for Charles Warren Eaton.*

208. White, pp. 214–215.

209. Quoted in Robert Hobbs, *Milton Avery: The Late Paintings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with the American Federation of Arts, 2001), p. 17.

210. Holger Cahill, *American Painting and Sculpture, 1862–1932*, exh. cat. (New York: Arno Press/The Museum of Modern Art, 1969; orignally published 1932 [W.W. Norton]), pp. 12–15.

211. Holger Cahill and Alfred H. Barr Jr., eds., *Art in America in Modern Times* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1934), pp. 43–44.

212. Quoted in Hobbs, *Milton Avery: The Late Paintings*, p. 9.

213. Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, p. 198.

214. Hilton Kramer, introduction to Robert Hobbs, *Milton Avery* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1990), pp. 24–25. Kramer also thought Avery's late landscapes represented a "more impressive achievement that Rothko's, for they encompass a far greater range of experience and bring to it a subtler and more varied pictorial vocabulary." p. 24.

215. Hobbs, *Milton Avery*, p. 34.

216. Ibid. Hobbs, *Milton Avery*, p. 34. Hobbs often uses the terms "Impressionism" and "Tonalism" interchangeably, and in his later writings on Avery, drops Tonalism entirely for Impressionism, citing American Impressionism as the dominant mode in 1905, which it clearly was not. It is fascinating that Avery, born and raised in central Connecticut in the

Hartford area was so completely captivated by the Tonalist artists of the era; he clearly would have known not just Twachtman, Weir, and J. Francis Murphy, but the Tonalist work of William Gedney Bunce, a Hartford artist, and Charles Harold Davis, Dwight Tryon, Charles Warren Eaton, and any number of others working in Connecticut and exhibiting in Hartford.

217. Quoted in Hobbs, *Milton Avery*, pp. 31–33.

218. Hobbs, *Milton Avery*, p. 91.

219. Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, pp. 198–200.

220. Quoted in Hobbs, *Milton Avery*, p. 83.

221. Quoted in Hobbs, *Milton Avery: The Late Paintings*, p. 53.

222. Hobbs, *Milton Avery*, p. 122.

223. Wrote Rothko biographer, James Breslin: "Some of these changes emerged slowly; Rothko's mature works, though produced when he no longer saw very much of Avery, owe something of their simplified, buoyant forms, their expressive use of color, their thinned pains, and even their quiet, to Avery." James Breslin, *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 96. About his early life in the Avery circle Rothko noted: "I cannot tell you what it meant for us … to be made welcome in those memorable studios on Broadway. The walls were always covered with an endless and changing array of poetry and light." p. 94.

224. Wrote Gottlieb of his debt to Avery: "When social realism and the American scene were considered the important things, [Avery] took an esthetic stand opposed to regional subject matter. I shared his point of view; and since he was ten years my senior and an artist I respected, his attitude helped reinforce me in my chosen direction. I always regarded him as a brilliant colorist and draftsman, a solitary figure working against the stream." Breslin, *Mark Rothko*, p. 96.

225. Quoted in Paul Wood, ed., *Varieties of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 103.

226. Quoted in Breslin, *Mark Rothko*, p. 332.

227. Karen Wilkin, *Color as Field: American Painting, 1950–1975* (New York: American Federation of Arts; in association with New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 22.

228. Robert Rosenblum, *On Modern American Art: Selected Essays* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), from his 1987 essay "Rothko and Tradition," p. 118.

229. Birge Harrison, "The American Temperament," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Letters*, 1909–10, p. 59.

230. Jed Perl, *New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 194.

231. Greenberg *Art and Culture*, p. 177.

232. Quoted in Perl, *New Art City*, p. 195.

233. Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 204.

234. Greenberg *Art and Culture*, p. 41 ("The Later Monet," 1956). "Nature, prodded by an eye obsessed with the most naïve kind of exactness, responded in the end with textures of color that could be managed on canvas only by invoking the autonomous laws of medium—which is to say that Nature became the springboard for an almost abstract art." p. 42. Greenberg went on to note that Monet's rehabilitation as a modernist in the 1950s was having an unsettling effect on contemporary art, causing a reevaluation of Cézanne and van Gogh. For Greenberg, size mattered: "In Monet [*Water Lilies*] we find a world of art, with the variety and spaciousness and ease of a *world*; in the short-lived Van Gogh, we find only the glimpse of one." p. 45. The best Greenberg could determine in terms of the origin of Monet's late style was that it "stimulated and met a new appetite for close-valued, flat effects in pictorial art—as did Bonnard's and Vuillard's first mature works." p. 38.

235. Rosenblum *On Modern American Art: Selected Essays*, pp. 119–120.

236. Quoted in Martica Sawin, *Wolf Kahn, Landscape Painter* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1981), p. 46.

237. Quoted in Justin Spring, *Fairfield Porter: A Life in Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 335.

238. Ibid., p. v.

239. Justin Spring, *Wolf Kahn* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p. 42.

240. Ibid., p. 43.

241. Wolf Kahn, interview with the author, April 3, 2009.

242. Wolf Kahn, *Wolf Kahn, Pastels* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000), p. 110.

243. Quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 44.

244. Kahn, *Pastels*, p. 20.

245. Quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 59.

246. Kahn, *Pastels*, p. 37,

247. Kahn interview.

248. Kahn, *Pastels*, p. 132.

249. Ibid.

250. "Mr. Inness on Art-Matters," 1879, p. 76, in Adrienne Baxter Bell, ed., *George Inness: Writing and Reflections on Art and Philosophy* (New York: George Braziller, 2006)

251. Kahn interview.

252. Quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 66.

253. Kahn, *Pastels*, p. 70.

254. Kahn interview.

255. Kahn, *Pastels*, p. 58.

256. Quoted in John Baur, *Nature in Abstraction: The Relation of Abstract Painting and Sculpture to Nature in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art; and The Macmillan Co., 1958), p. 10.

257. Kahn interview.

258. Quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 79.

259. Kahn interview.

260. Ibid.

261. Kahn, *Pastels*, p. 19.

262. Quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 83.

263. Louis Finkelstein quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 110. In his essay included in Spring's book on Kahn, Finkelstein further extrapolates on Kahn's color usage thus—a modern colorist's approximation or upgrading of Birge Harrison's classic textbook description of Tonalist method: "Interval is a serious concern, not only between adjacent colors, but scaled to the whole range of colors present on the canvas, particularly as each color participates in the enveloping airiness of the environment. Kahn adjusts the amount given to depth, the amount of lateral expansion, the amount given to luminosity, transparency, and density. He develops the internal voicings to colors that recall and augment each other as in a musical composition. Broken, blended, glazed, and scumbled colors are posed one against the other, not to approximate a particular appearance, but to make an internally rich and coherent structure." p. 122.

264. Campell quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 82. Lawrence Campbell, "Wolf Kahn at Grace Borgenicht," *Art in America* 71 (October 1983), p. 185.

265. Kahn quoted in Spring, *Wolf Kahn*, p. 96.

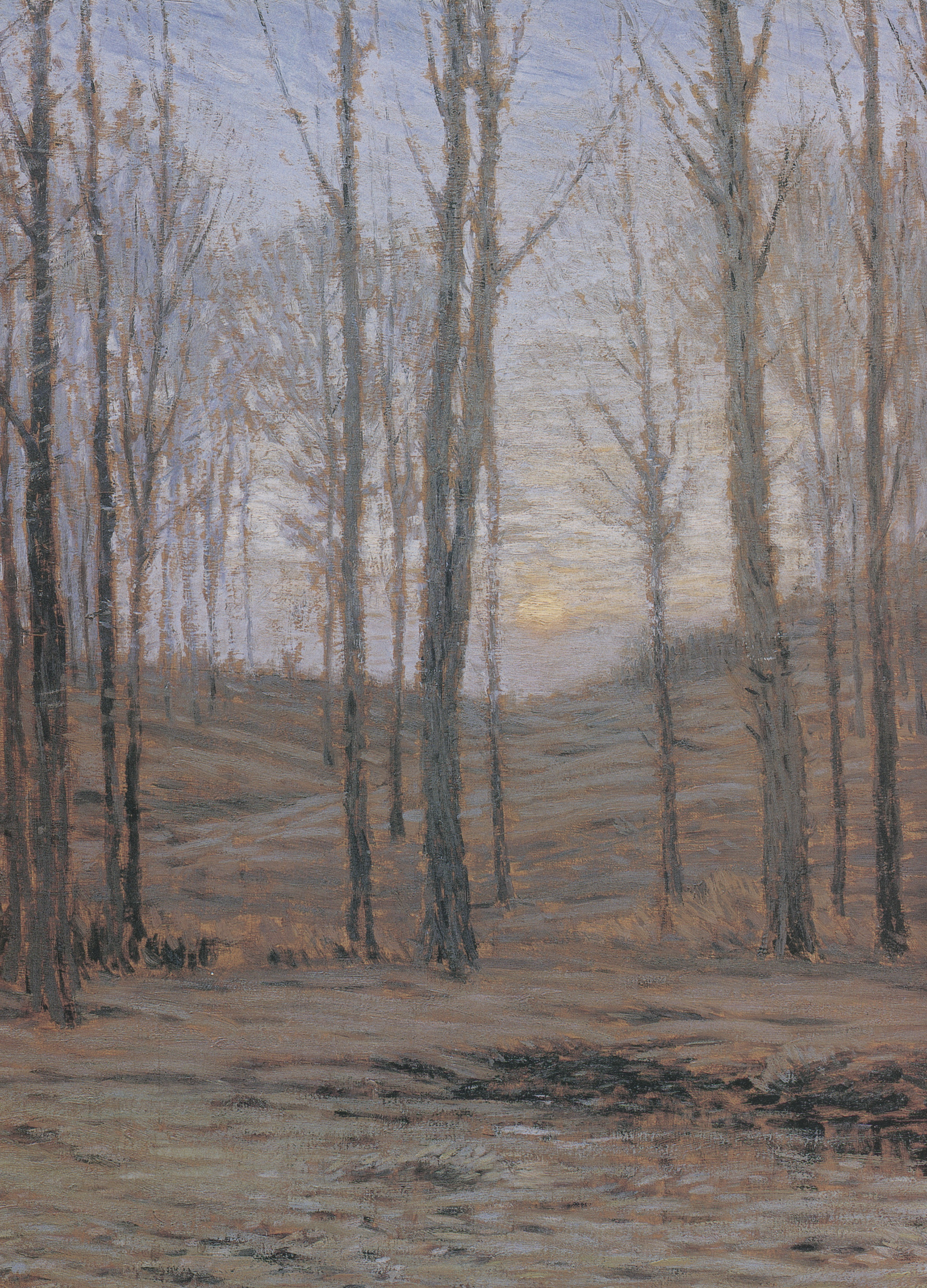
266. Mayhew quotes from his interview with Andrew Walker, *Transcendence, Richard Mayhew*, ACA Galleries.

LIST OF ARTISTS: THE THREE GENERATIONS (pp. 571–572)

1. The following are examples of borderline cases included on the list: Paris-based Frederick Bridgman (illustrated) pursued figurative

Orientalism for most of his career, but his early Tonalist landscapes were very influential in the development of Tonalism as it evolved in the American art colonies in Brittany. John White Alexander (not illustrated) was one of the greatest Tonalist portraitists and figurative painters of the day, second only to Whistler and Dewing; his few landscapes are very fine. George Smillie (illustrated) makes it onto the list because of his best work, even though the repetitive and uneven nature of his late work might rule him out. Charles Lasar (illustrated) is included because of his huge influence on American artists working in Brittany and Paris, although the full scope of his work—the locations of much of it remain unknown—may not come up to the standards of the best Tonalists. Walter Lunt Palmer (illustrated) is included for the freshness of his early work, even though he rehashed his signature style of winterscapes throughout his career; de Kay found him repetitive, cloying, and his snow-clad trees overwrought caricatures. Robert Crannell Minor is included (illustrated) even though much of his work is derivative of Barbizon and Dutch sources; Minor was a fine technician and produced a good number of evocative works—some were praised by Charles de Kay and sold for some of the highest prices of any Tonalist in his generation. Tonalists such as Charles P. Appel (1857–1934), George H. Bogert (1864–1944), Lewis Cohen (1858–1915), Carlton Wiggins (1848–1932), Robert Van Boskerck (1855–1932) (illustrated), and Albert Lorey Groll (1866–1952) (illustrated), among others, fail to make the list for lack of qualitative consistency or individual character—the cardinal sin of derivativeness—over the broad spectrum of their work.

2. Winslow Homer is included in the prime generation of Tonalists for his late Tonalist marines, circa 1900.



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